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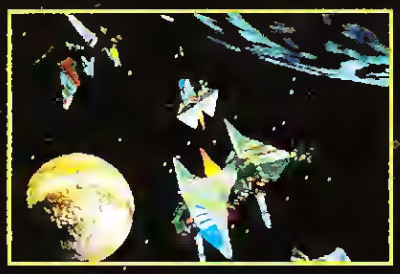

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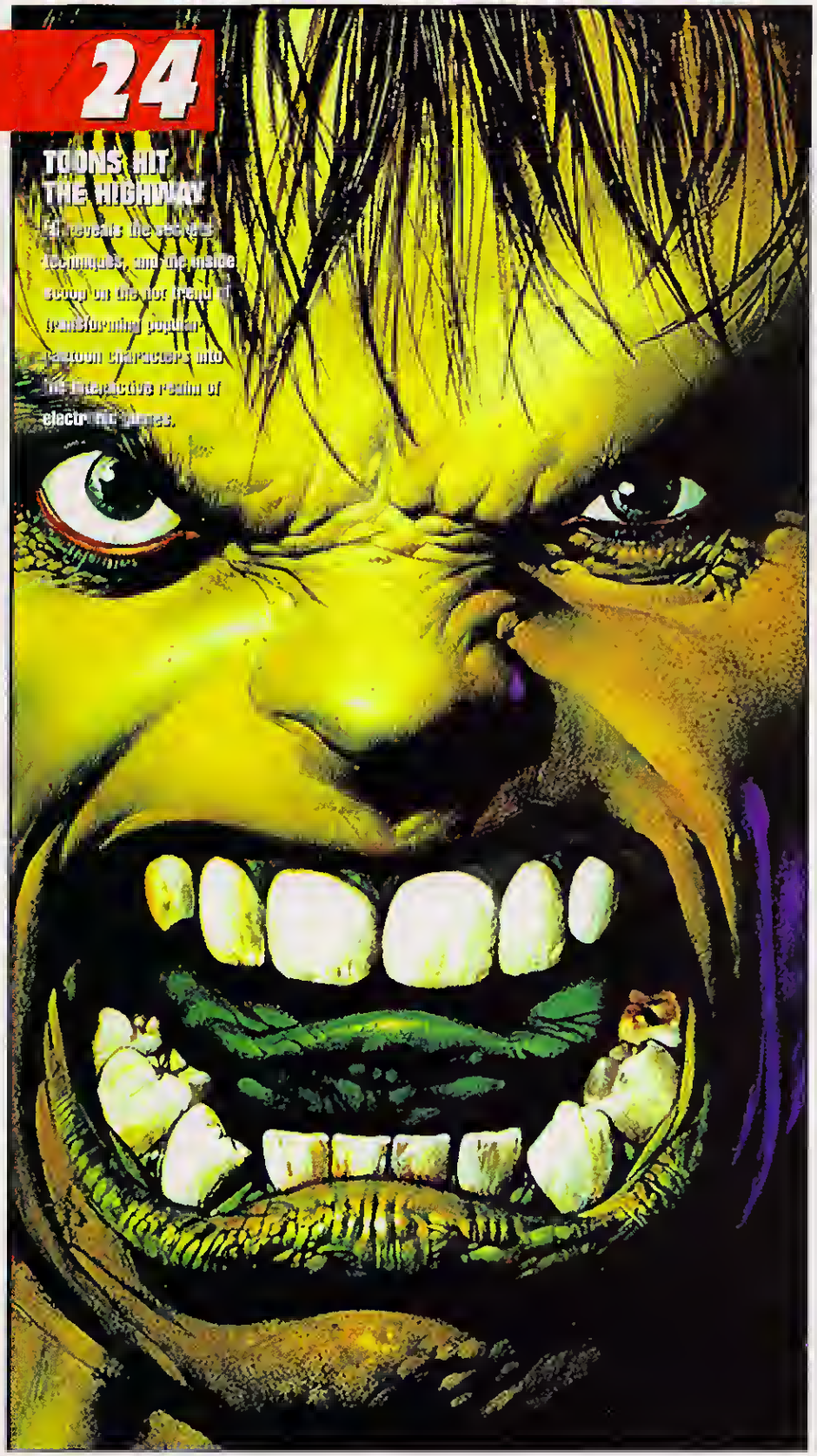

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POWER ON!

RED (INK) SAILS INTO THE SUNSET

by ARNIE KATZ

"Commodore may have deserved to die. Very likely, interactive electronic entertainment will be stronger as a result."

Commodore is gone. The Wizards of West Chester who gave us the VIC-20 and Commodore 64 and brought the Amiga to market will work their magic no more. Not at that address, anyway.

The company shut down its American operation. The expectation is that Commodore will sell what assets it can and continue its stately progress toward the Big Stock Exchange in the Sky where old corporations go when their time on Earth is through.

Probably, when you read the news last issue, you were as shocked as we were when Joyce Worley filed the story. (Don't miss the firsthand accounts of the Final Days in this month's "Hotline.") Any time a familiar name sinks, it's a surprise.

It really shouldn't have been such a surprise. Commodore is also the outfit that saddled the world with the Plus Four, ruined the Amiga, and undercut its CDTV with abysmal software. Management made enough mistakes to swamp 10 companies. The real surprise is that this once-mighty industry giant took so long to topple.

Commodore may have deserved to die. Very likely, interactive electronic entertainment will be stronger as a result.

Don't get me wrong. The bankruptcy of a large company is a collection of tragedies, make no mistake about that. It's the factory worker who loses his house as well as his job, the supplier staggered with uncollectible debt, and the end of the little luncheonette that needed that noon crowd to survive.

Many former Commodore employees are already working at new jobs. They are the lucky ones. Some may never experience comparable career satisfaction, and others even more unfortunate may never work in their chosen field again.

That's the karmic debris of a failure of this magnitude. So no matter how misguided many of Commodore's policies were, I can't find it within myself to crow over the demise of this once-proud hardware and software manufacturer.

This is a time to think fondly of Commodore's glorious past, to recall memories, funny stories at the time, suddenly turned poignant by subsequent events. In retrospect, that CES yacht party in the mid-1980s "at which some of Commodore's guests got sick on bad shrimp" now seems more like a metaphor for the whole story than a bad night for a few overeating journalists.

It's a time to think wistfully of what might have been. What if Commodore had aggressively supported the Amiga? What if it had marketed its multimedia black box, CDTV, with more intelligence?

And after we've mourned its passing and pondered the tantalizing "what if?" scenarios, it's time to try to understand what happened. It is time to analyze the forces, both internal and external, which shipwrecked Commodore.

The death of one company does not indicate ill health in the industry. In our capitalistic economy, the companies that most effectively meet consumer demand gain market share while those who fail to consistently hit the target will go off course and vanish.

Examples of this process are plentiful in other industries. Look at how many U.S. automobile manufacturers were in business in 1910! By the 1950s, competition pared down the competitors to three majors (Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler) plus one or two small ones like American Motors.

Did consumer demand for cars decrease during those four decades? Obviously, the exact reverse happened. A lot of companies crashed and burned even though the market expanded exponentially. They lost out because they didn't make the kind of cars people wanted to buy at the price they wanted to pay.

Commodore is gone because it couldn't compete with its rivals. Even the tremendous growth of the cyberverse couldn't mask the mistakes or overcome the problems.

One sour project or short-sighted decision didn't seal Commodore's fate. It took a decade of floundering to scuttle it. Listing all the causes would require a lot more space, so let's look at couple of real killers.

Commodore never understood software. It made some good machines, notably the Commodore 64 and the Amiga, but it rarely considered what users would be doing with them after the purchase.

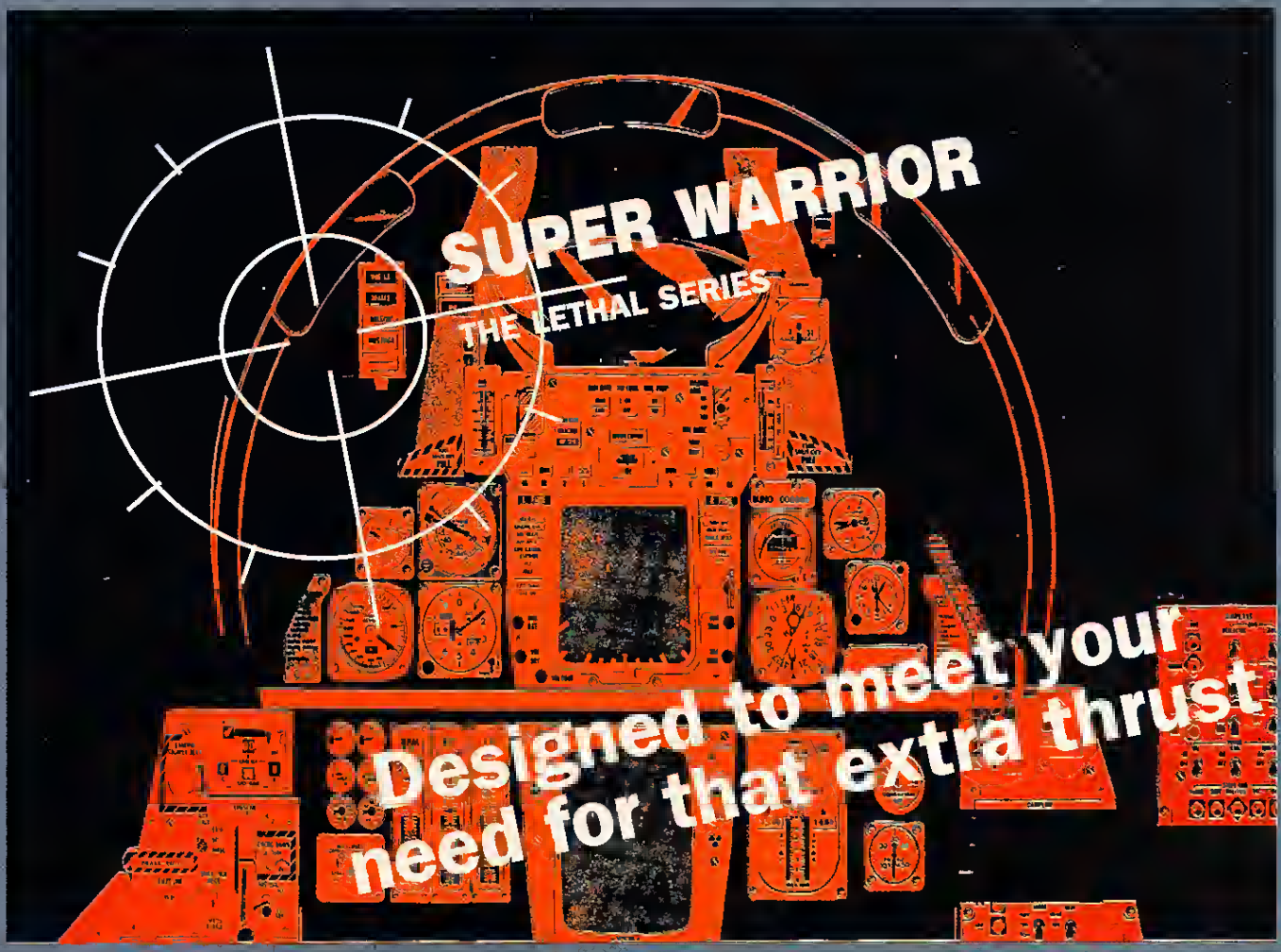
Although Commodore dabbled in software development from time to time, as when it hired John Mathias in the early 1980s, it never mounted a sustained, well-financed effort.

If a hardware maker isn't going to produce its own software, it had better have excellent relations with third-party publishers. Commodore didn't have a clue. A typically bright move was to cancel most of the major entertainment development projects on the eve of the CDTV introduction.

Commodore's other capital crime was its disdain for entertainment. Though entertainment helped make the C-64 the popular home computer of the early 1980s, the manufacturer forgot this lesson in later years. The lack of good games for CDTV guaranteed a cool reception from consumers, and there was no indication that things were going to improve for the CD^{32}.

Computers can do many things, from productivity to education. But it's the promise of entertaining experiences that opens the wallet. It's games that motivate people to bring that black box home.

Commodore forgot, and it paid the ultimate price, extinction.



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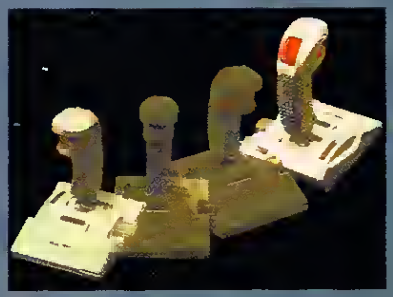

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FEEDBACK

The Play's the Thing

"...Visual wizardry is becoming increasingly designer-friendly, while the play mechanics takes a back seat..."

As Shakespeare once mused, "The play's the thing," and when it comes to the new wave of video games boasting eye-popping visuals (**EG**, May '94), truer words were ne'er spoke.

As a gamer since the dawn of the home programmable (the original Odyssey of the mid-'70s was my first system), I have watched the hobby evolve and devolve, crest and ultimately crash. When the almighty dollar becomes the sole motivator, third-rate parasites set up shop to rush low-grade product to market. That was the fundamental impetus behind the Video Game Crash of the mid-'80s. This is not to say that flashy graphics in today's video games represent low-grade product, however, with burgeoning technology, such visual wizardry is becoming increasingly designer-friendly, while the play mechanics takes a back seat. Ironically, the reason the early game cartridges were so challenging and addicting was due largely to the systems' limitations. Drop-dead graphics were impossible, hence designers had to compensate with strong play value. My eye-hand coordination has not been challenged sufficiently since Activision's **Kaboom!** (1981); my eternal wish for a satisfying sports cartridge has not been granted since Coleco's **Super Action Baseball** (1983) or Activision's **Tennis** (1981), and my sense of true game playing addiction has not been sparked since **Ladybug** (1982) by Coleco. It's not the graphics, it is the challenge, originality, playability, and, above all, replayability. Games must be designed with the player in mind, not "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

William Simpson
Los Angeles, CA

Both Activision's ***Kaboom*** *and* ***Tennis*** *(the first 3/4-angled perspective video game—newer simulations of the courtly contest have merely added details) were not only excellent games but strong steps forward graphically, for the time. On the other hand, current golf games are worlds beyond the initial Atari effort, in both playability and graphics. (Does the good Doctor Demento play video golf on Wednesdays?) We do see highly replayable games coming out these days as well as duds, and that, too, is as it ever was. Sometimes it's harder to find them—but* ***EG*** *(whose staff motto has been "The play's the thing" for years) is here to help separate the wheat from the chaff. Not incidentally, you win the STD controller this month.*

Good Choice

• Aladdin

I would like to congratulate the ***Electronic Games*** readership for picking **Aladdin** for Video Game of the Year. (**Mortal Kombat** didn't even come close. HA!) The fact that your magazine is geared toward an older audience, combined with the fact that **Aladdin** got the award is living proof that there is a large number of video game players who still favor good clean fun, and should not be ignored. "Freedom of Choice" goes both ways, folks, and they weren't forced by any politicians either. I hope software developers take note.

Mark Price
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

*As we pointed out in the Electronic Gaming Awards story (****EG****, May '94),* ***Aladdin*** *(Virgin-Sega/Genesis) swept the category with more votes than the other candidates combined.*

Thanks to all of you who wrote for sharing your thoughts with us. Your monthly input helps immensely in our effort to bring you the best Electronic Entertainment magazine possible. Let's hear from the rest of you too! Write to:

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And now, contact ***EG*** *on-line!*
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HOTLINE

THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO THE ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Hard Times At Media Vision

Slump In Sales Rocks Stocks

Shooting stars sometimes crash to the ground.

Media Vision's soaring profits made it the darling of the multimedia industry. Founded in mid-1990 by Paul Jain, president and CEO, the company had the clear-cut goal of supplying multimedia products, including sound, video, CD-ROM drives, and semi-conductors. The plan was solid. The company produced products that were snapped up in the growing multimedia marketplace as people rushed to buy add-on products to upgrade their computers to run popular multimedia products.

Then in 1993, the company formed its own multimedia publishing division for entertainment and educational software. **Quantum Gate**, **Critical Path**, and **Forever Growing Garden** attracted critical attention in the press. Revenues increased dramatically. The company did better than $69 million in sales in 1992; then tripled in 1993.

On Feb. 17, 1994, the company announced revenues of approximately $241 million in 1993. The future looked rosy as Paul Jain assured analysts.

The next day, Media Vision's stock dropped almost 50 percent in value, and since that date, the stock has continued to plummet. In just a little over one month, the value of the company decreased by almost a half-billion dollars.

What Happened?

The decline in values began when the company disclosed almost $81 million in unsold inventory. Explanations offered by the company's officials seemed fairly straightforward. Late in 1993, they began to worry that there might be equipment shortages in the marketplace in December, so the company increased its production, building up a larger inventory. At the same time, receipts for sold products were slow in arriving, and the company's outstanding Accounts Receivable almost doubled in the last half of the year.

Then, to further complicate the trouble, some of the competitors in the sound and video card business cut prices. Media Vision officials responded with their own price cuts, and

let their stockholders know that they expected a definite decline in revenues in first quarter 1994.

These dramatic changes started a cascade of confidence by the company's stockholders. On March 25, and again on March 28, suits were filed that alleged violations of the Securities Exchange Act, naming many various company officers and directors as defendants.

On April 1, Media Vision told the Securities and Exchange Commission that it was delaying its Annual Report for 1993, while they considered adjusting the financial statement. The company announced that these adjustments might be appropriate in view of the price reductions.

The effect of these reversals of fortune was electric. Several officers and directors resigned, including executive vice president Min Yee, the prominent author and multimedia expert, and board members Bernard Vondeischmitt and Curtis Wozniak.

Early in May, Paul Jain confirmed that the company was under investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission with assistance of the FBI. In mid-May, Jain was replaced by Robert Brownell who became acting president and CEO of Media Vision.

The company postponed its Annual Stockholders Meeting until the end of July, and laid off 50 people. It also closed its office in Belleview, WA, where software titles were developed, and transferred all active projects to the California headquarters.

On May 17, Media Vision's suppliers and creditors formed a committee to try to work out a satisfactory payment plan, and Media Vision agreed to work with the committee to settle its outstanding indebtedness.

Can It Be Turned Around?

Robert Brownell promised that Media Vision would resolve its cash flow problems. "We will continue to take appropriate steps to restructure the company," and he went on to boldly promise recruitment of new officers and board members.

Elizabeth Fairchild, spokeswoman for Media Vision, was optimistic as she explained the company's hopes for recovery: "We have a strong revenue source in our multimedia kits and sound cards. Over 10,000 retail stores carry our products."

She went on: " The inventory—well, that's really our crown jewels. After all, these products are new technology."

The stock price, which was once at $43.25, bottomed at $2 and had crawled up to almost $6.00 by early June. Analysts have mixed feelings about where it will go from here.

Meanwhile, the company is continuing to ship product including its new line of CD-ROM players, and preparing to introduce a new family of sound cards. The company premiered several games at Summer CES.

According to Brownell, the second quarter of 1994 started with very strong shipments, and the sell through at the store level is good. "I believe these problems can be surmounted ... we are doing everything possible to stabilize the situation."

Looking To The Future

Allan Thygesen, Vice President and General Manager of the Publishing Group, spoke optimistically of Media Vision's plans for the balance of this year. "We're focusing on a smaller number of software products," he explained. However, he assured us, the company is continuing to ship new products. "We can solve these issues; the turmoil of management and financial reporting."

Products that had been in the design stage but not yet in the development cycle were either halted, or funded to a milestone and then put on hold.

The reorganization hasn't affected products already in development; they are moving forward, and the company will introduce four new software packages before Christmas, all for both PC and Macintosh CD-ROM. **Hodj & Podj** is an all-family board game set in a fantasy world; **The Daedalus Encounter** and **Quantum Gate II** are the upcoming big productions, and **Coolsville** is a musical adventure for teens or adults. *(Joyce Worley)*

Can They Save The Company?

An EG Perspective

It's rare to see such a sudden change in a company's fortunes, but misjudgments in the hardware industry are very costly.

The suits filed against the Media Vision officers are probably inconsequential. Most analytical comment agrees that these suits happen when losses occur, and they are usually set aside.

The company's products have a good reputation, and their distribution channels are still working properly. Currently, stores are full of Media Vision equipment. Although no sales figures are available, it seems to be moving well. The new sound cards will likely sell well when introduced.

Not many companies have recovered from such big losses, but Media Visions' steps toward reorganization may do the trick. With skilled management and a little luck in the marketplace, they could make it back.

(Joyce Worley)

Censorship Update

RATINGS BOARDS IN DEVELOPMENT

The important trade associations of the gaming industry are moving toward establishment of a rating system for software before the deadline imposed by Congress. Bills introduced in the House and Senate call for the industry to set voluntary rating standards within one year; otherwise, the President will appoint a five-member Interactive Entertainment Rating Commission.

A group of interactive entertainment companies formed the Interactive Digital Software Association, and promise an independent rating board, guidelines, and rating symbols. Charter members are Acclaim, Atari, Capcom, Crystal Dynamics, Electronic Arts, Konami, Nintendo, Philips, Sega, Sony, Viacom, and Virgin.

Jack Heistand, Sr., VP of EA and acting chairman for the IDSA, met with the Senate Subcommittee with the group's preliminary plans, then reported back to the group: "Congress, consumers, and retailers have made it clear to us that the benchmark of a credible reliable rating system is independent review and ratings prior to a product's arrival in stores."

Meanwhile, Ken Wasch, the Software Publisher's Association's executive director, has had a continuing dialog with Senator Lieberman. The Senator rejected proposals of separate rating standards for different platforms and any self-administered ratings by the publishers, and expressed doubt that an exemption to the ratings could be made for educational software.

Senate Requests Store Cooperation

The Senate Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Regulation & Government Information provided EG with a copy of the letter sent in May to all leading video game retailers. Senators Lieberman and Kohl informed the stores of moves to develop ratings, and urged them to support the system. The letter reads, in part, as follows:

"We ask that you commit to sell only interactive entertainment products rated by an independent, pre-market rating process and that you make it clear that software initially rated by publishers will not be carried. We also urge that you adopt other appropriate policies to ensure that the rating system is effective."

The letter went on to request the store management reply: "Please let us know what commitments your company will make concerning implementation of the rating system."

The Last Days at Commodore

Rumor and innuendo surround the closing of the Commodore headquarters in West Chester, PA. The company kept a close lid on internal affairs during the last months, and it was difficult to know how the giant corporation was dealing with its decline.

Since management wasn't talking to the press, EG went to the people most affected by the collapse, the stockholders and employees who lost jobs and savings when Commodore bottomed out. In interviews and meetings, a picture began to emerge of a corporation moving for years toward collapse, through a drawn-out pattern of executive error and well-meaning mistakes.

Randall Jesup, formerly the OS group head at Commodore, bosted the last-night party of 50-60 ex-employees. "It was a good time to get together and let everyone hang out before they all scattered to the four winds."

The party lasted from 3 p.m. to 3 a.m., and in Jesup's words, "There was lots of blowing off steam." Someone had made a paper-mache doll of Medhi Ali, the President, to burn in effigy. Someone else came up with a whole bunch of broken or defective keyboards, so they had a keyboard smash on the driveway. Posted on a bulletin board was a memo inviting folks to write their own verse to the Chicken Lip Blues. One was: "I got the Chicken Lip Blues; I got a computer I can no longer use."

"It wasn't all bad, though. There was lots of nostalgia about the good old days. Gail Wellington, the mother of CD-TV, was in town that weekend, so she came out. She had gone in one of the big layoffs a year or so ago."

As the night wore on, a bunch went to Commodore at 3 a.m., and spray painted all of the speed bumps in the Commodore parking lot, then named the impediments after the people they felt were responsible, like Medhi and Irving Gould (Chairman of the Board and CEO). "The next day the executives made the maintenance guy paint over them," laughed Jesup.

What Made It Happen?

Randall Jesup offered an explanation. "Commodore had returned to profitability two years ago, but they needed to change over to new technology. This was Medhi's first thing to handle. He had brought in Bill Sydnew (the man responsible for the IBM-PC Jr.) to take charge of engineering. They decided to go ahead with a replacement, but it was crippled technology. It was no better, just had a few additional features. They did the Amiga 600, but it wasn't expandable, and it really didn't do well.

"The second bad decision came a year later. We were working on a new graphics chip technology, and trying to get it out by Christmas. Bill instead changed to building a machine with the old chip, and backburnered the new chip.

"All the engineers knew this was wrong. I, with input from the others, wrote a memo to try to get them to switch over to the Double A [the Amiga 1200] by Christmas. But Medhi only let us have 70,000 chips assembled that year, so we could only make 70,000 new computers.

"But Medhi wanted 400,000 units by Christmas, so he set up production to make 330,000 of the old machines. Naturally, they didn't sell well due to the older technology. There were $300 million in losses from that," he sadly reported.

Michael Levin attended the March 2 Commodore stockholder meeting. According to Levin, Commodore officials gave no false hopes at that time; they admitted the situation was grave. The stockholders urged the company to take action: to grant non-exclusive licenses of Amiga technology to the companies who might have purchased them.

Levin feels that Commodore misapplied their resources: "They stayed in the DOS market too long, and didn't update the Amiga soon enough. The Amiga 600 detracted resources and time, preventing the next generation computer from coming out."

The feeling among many stockholders is one of betrayal. Levin explained this: "Normally in a case like this a consortium of creditors petition a judge, and the judge decides how to distribute the assets. But in this case, Commodore appointed the trustees themselves. Now the trustees are in the Bahamas where shareholders can't influence them. In fact, creditors can only barely influence them." Jerry Crosson, a former senior analyst in Commodore's Quality Assurance Department, said, "It was a case of dithering... 'are we going to introduce this or that' ... yes ... no ... but never a strong commitment. It seemed they'd get nine-tenths of the way toward completing a project, then stop."

According to Crosson, the technical people wanted Commodore to be a high-end company; the idea of making mere game machines was considered beneath them. "When it came to actually making money, to producing something, the company would sort of lag ... There could have been a role for them [in the industry], but there were unrealistic expectations."

Another stockholder, Ed Gee, recalled how devoted the Amiga users were: "When the stock bottomed out at around $4, a bunch of us got to talking and said, 'If enough users bought stock, we'd control the company.' We talked up this concept on Internet. Lo! and behold ... in a 3-6 month period, it moved to six, then advanced to 10, and peaked at 22 in 1991. Then it quickly dropped to 15, bounced back to 17, then dropped forevermore. I really believed in the product, so I bought 3000 shares at $8; I thought the stock would go back up." Despite his loss, his love for the product stays unchanged: "It's such a shame: The Amiga was the most powerful tool ever put into users' hands."

Jeff Porter, head engineer before Bill Sydnew, stayed with Commodore until the end of May. He explained to us that the bankruptcy bearing filed in the Bahamas has not yet concluded, and it is difficult to determine, in the maze of companies that is Commodore, just who now controls the assets: the corporate officers Medhi and Gould, the accounting firm in the Bahamas, an investment banking firm in New Jersey, or Prudential, the major creditor. It is unclear at this point who can make a deal, and any decisions would be subject to approval of the others.

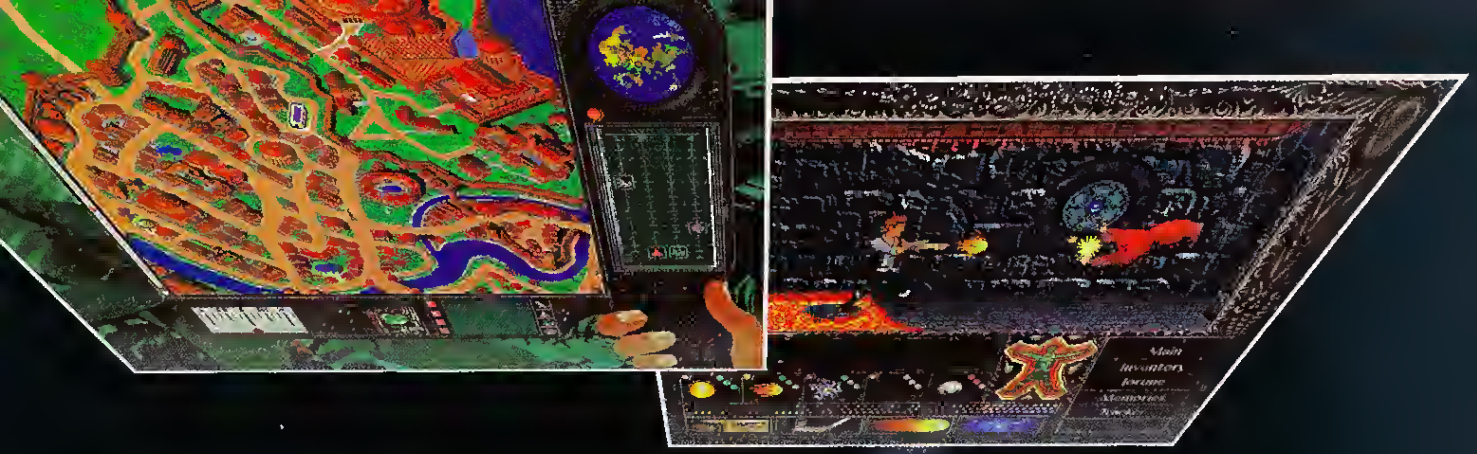
But over 26 companies are currently bidding for the technology. "Someone will have to be the judge," said Porter, "to decide what will maximize the assets of the company and raise the most money."

What is happening now?

A few people, 10 or 15, are still at Commodore headquarters, and of the 35 Commodore companies worldwide, many are still open, though most have drastically reduced personnel. The ones in Germany and England seem to still be open. Commodore France and Commodore USA are gone.

At this point, Medhi Ali is still president, and Irving Gould is still chairman and CEO. He's also a major shareholder and the major creditor, since in just one transaction, he had loaned Commodore $20 million, making him the big loser in the demise of the once-mighty company.

(Joyce Worley)



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NOTLING

Compiled by Joyce Worley & Ross Chamberlin

STARS SHINE ON GAMES

There's no end to the number of Hollywood and television actors signing on to be in games. Spectrum Holobyte has agreements for the eight stars of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* to contribute their voices to a CD-ROM adventure. Tia Carrere (the actress from *Wayne's World)* will star in Media Vision's **The Daedalus Encounter.** Take 2 signed Bill Cosby, to be the on-screen companion in **Bill Cosby's Picture Pages.**

Meanwhile, HyperBole Studios signed with the Agency for the Performing Arts. APA will connect HyperBole with the appropriate talent to act in multimedia projects.

Bill Cosby on his educational TV show Picture Pages.

BATMAN GOES ARCADING

Acclaim took a dramatic new step in electronic gaming. The company, overwhelmingly successful in its cartridge operation, has formed the Coin-Operated Amusement Division, and plan to enter the play-for-pay market in 1995. The first arcade game from Acclaim will be **Batman Forever,** based on the Warner Bros. movie now in development.

The coin-op uses Sega's Titan hardware technology, coupled with Acclaim's motion-capture technology.

JURY SAYS NES INFRINGED PATENT

A New York jury upheld a 1977 patent for Alpex Computer Corp's general purpose personal computer and game player, and said that the patent was infringed by the Nintendo Entertainment System and some of the games for the system.

Lynn Hvalsoe, General Counsel of Nintendo of America, provided extra information. Alpex Computer Corp. of Connecticut, now a defunct company, had two employee inventors, Kirshner and Haskell, who created certain technology for a programmable video game player. The system was patented, but never marketed. According to Ms. Hvalsoe, there was some license relationship between their process and the Fairchild Channel F technology. The NES and at least 150 8-Bit games, including the **Mario** titles, are affected by the patent.

Nintendo's attorney asked Judge Wood to enter judgement for Nintendo, but if that is denied, the trial, which may be lengthy, will begin on July 18.

SCHOOL KIDS TOUR ABSOLUTE

Absolute gave students from John F. Kennedy High School, Paterson, NJ, a tour in recognition of National Science and Technology Week. Garry Kitchen, president and CEO of

Absolute, said the tour gave them "an excellent hands-on opportunity to see the way video games are developed ... they are familiar with the game play, but have no idea what makes it go." He spoke to them about the video game business. They saw the stages of production including paper animation, computer art, music, programming, and product testing, and got to play some of Absolute's games.

Absolute also announced the beginning of work on a game for Sega CD and Genesis with offbeat magicians Penn & Teller. **Penn & Teller's Smoke and Mirrors**, scheduled for winter release, will include several independent elements including an interactive magic trick.

LASERACTIVE PRICE DROPPED

Pioneer Electronics lowered the suggested retail price of the LaserActive player by $235, to $735, and reduced the price of two game control packs to $485.

The game packs fit into the player and emulate the Sega Genesis or Turbo Technologies' Duo, so that those software libraries are available for play on the LaserActive.

New software currently in development includes, among others, the environmental program being completed by actor and environmentalist Robert Redford and New Learning Project (see story last month). The company expects to have 20 entertainment titles available by the end of 1994.

A GREAT DEAL OF DEALS

BIZ-DEALS

Spectrum Holobyte licensed the rights from Paramount to make software based on the *Star Trek Generations* movie scheduled for release November 18 ... Cagey Capers, the Sylvester & Tweety game in development for Genesis by TecMagik, will be distributed by Time Warner Interactive, making it the first video game published under their label ... The man who used to be Prince, and the Berenstain Bears, are subjects of Interactive CD-ROMs from Cinemtnns New Media ... Sigma Designs opened the ReelMagic DOS application programming interface command set for use royalty-free by hardware manufacturers. This should give MPEG software an extra kickstart; there are over 140 developers supporting that standard ... Software Sorcery is accelerating their development, thanks to an infusion of $2.25 million in venture capital...

DISTRI-DEALS

The CD-ROM version of **Iron Helix** (Spectrum Holobyte) will be bundled with products from Creative Labs, Reveal, and AdLib Multimedia ... Interplay will represent Putnam New Media in the OEM market, to pack their products with various hardware ... Advanced Gravis is pairing Microsoft **Flight Simulator** with the Gravis Analog Joystick, and with the Analog Pro Joystick for a limited time offer to high fliers ... Electronic Arts will distribute Eidnlon's multimedia "intellitainment" titles (a name coined for adult-oriented entertainment); the first game affected by the Affiliated Label Distribution Agreement is **Millennium Auctinn**...

EDU-DEALS

Medio Multimedia's World Beat (MPC CD-ROM) uses a spinning globe as its interface; click on any country to access their music. Videoclips, animation, and photos present history and commentary, as users tinker with the tempo or browse the extensive database ... Comic Charles Fleischer (the voice of *Roger Rabbit)* joined the 7th Level project team for **The Universe According to Virgil Reality.**

It's time you finally did something about those monsters under your bed.

3DO

You're not a helpless kid anymore. You've grown up and you've got *Slayer*,™ the first ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game on 3DO.

Now you're an AD&D® game hero armed with weapons and magic, exploring dungeons filled with the deadly monsters of your nightmares.

Hack and slash away at these vile creatures, avoid treacherous traps and solve mind-bending puzzles.

The randomized dungeon generator can create over *4 billion* different dungeons.

Which means a new monster hunt every time you play!

Because it's designed for play on 3DO, *Slayer* gives you the most awesome graphics and animation you've ever seen. Plus a first-person perspective that lets you look up, down and all around.

It's virtually real!

Slayer. It's time you made those monsters look under *their* beds!.

TO ORDER: Visit your retailer or call 1-800-245-4525 with Visa or MasterCard (U.S. & Canada only).

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NOTING

WHISPERS FROM PAVILION X

JJ Barrel—he's everywhere! He desktops by night and speaks the truths others dare not utter. JJ puts his private eyes and inside spies into every corner of electronic gaming. Our investigative ace takes no prisoners.

And now, direct to you via Internet from his mountain hideaway in exclusive Alexandria, Virginia... JJ Barrel!

Roberta Williams is going back to her roots. After she polishes off *Phantasmagoria*, she'll co-design **Kings Quest VII**. Don't look for Jane Jensen on the credit screen; she's busy with other projects...

Raymond Feist and Dynamix have split. The sci-fi writer wanted a whole Medkimia line, but the publisher didn't see it that way. Feist is trying to sell the license elsewhere, while Dynamix tries to develop a new title to follow **Krondor**. John Cutter and Neil Halford have both left Dynamix, so it's prospecting for a new team...

A legal battle is shaping up in the controller business. STD got a patent on programmables, and there'll be sparks when they try to enforce their rights...

Everybody knows that June's CES in Chicago will be the last in the Windy City. What hasn't been announced is that it's the last Summer CES, period. Next May's Philadelphia show in Philadelphia is CES Interactive and exclusively multimedia....

Do those new 3DO commercials seem ... familiar? They're done by people who last worked for Goodby, Berlin, and Silverstein, which took us to Sega's Next Level...

"I was misquoted!" That phrase drives journalists nuts. When a well-known designer had-mouthed co-workers to a magazine and got flack at his company, he tried that dodge. The writer had a tape to prove the quotes, and now the game guy is in twice as much trouble!

STUDENTS DESIGN FUTURE CITY

Three Yorba Linda, CA, students, ages 13 and 14, used Maxis' **SimCity Classic** to design the winning entry in the national 1994 Future City Contest. Jeff Carroll, Cory Jobst and Jacob Smith created an energy-efficient futuristic city using

The proud winners of the National SimCity Classic Contest.

SimCity, then created an actual physical model, to fit the theme, "Space Exploration and its Practical Application to Our City." The team won software, and a trip to the U.S. Space Camp in Alabama.

WOMEN IN GAMING

Copy-editing mangled the biographic information on Linda Blanchard in the July issue. We apologize: no slight was intended to Linda who is one of the industry's most knowledgeable and dynamic women, and a long-time supporter of this magazine.

GAMES CATAPULT ON-LINE

Catapult Entertainment plans to introduce a modem for video

game consoles, and a network service for gamers. The newly formed company will market Catapult modems (to be distributed by T*HQ) for the Sega and Nintendo 16-Bit consoles. They also plan to start the Catapult Network to provide tips, scores, rankings, and competition information to players, who will be able to compete in real-time on-line.

The network's monthly fees will run $5-10 depending on usages, and there'll be controls available so parents can limit a child's time on-line. The price of the modem will be about the same as a game cartridge.

IMAGINATION NET TAKES CHESS LIVE

This is a first for on-line services. The ImagiNation Network had live, interactive coverage of the Intel World Chess Championship Quarterfinals, June 7-18, held at Trump Tower in NYC.

The players entered their moves into laptop computers connected by modem with the ImagiNation Network, so that viewers could witness the moves as they were made.

The players also made comments on the moves, discussed the game and various strategies, and actually chatted with the game watchers while on-line.

3DO

Come see a 3DO™ Demo.

WEST

July 23rd
Babbage's, Bellevue Shopping Center, Bellevue, WA

August 13th
Circuit City, Emeryville, CA

August 27th
G&G/Captron, Vallco Mall Cupertino, CA

September 3rd
Circuit City, Emeryville, CA

MIDWEST

July 30th
Electronics Boutique, Bloomington, MN

August 6th
Electronics Boutique Woodfield Mall, Schaumburg, IL

August 13th
Electronics Boutique Overland Park, KS

August 20th
Babbage's, Northbrook Court Northbrook, IL

August 27th
GameStop, Mall of America Bloomington, MN

EAST

July 30th
Software Etc Willowbrook Mall Wayne, NJ

August 6th
Software Etc.
Menlo Park Mall, Edison, NJ

August 20th
Software Etc
Route 22, Springfield, NJ

August 27th
Talk of the Town
Franklin Turnpike, Allendale, NJ

SOUTH

July 15th
Babbage's, Aventura Mall, North Miami, FL

July 23rd
Electronics Boutique
Vista Ridge, Lewisville, TX

July 27th
Babbage's Miami International Miami, FL

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Apparently, 1 out of 10 people is a blithering idiot.

(The other 9 chose the 3DO™ system over other home gaming systems at the 3DO Challenge.)

We invited visitors at 3DO promotional displays to check out a side by side comparison with other home gaming systems. 9 out of 10 people who completed the Challenge chose the 3DO system. (The other 1 probably still likes disco music too.) They were asked about stuff like graphics, sound quality, and bitchin-ness of play. But hey, you're a 70's guy. You don't believe everything you read. Fine. Good. Come and see for yourself then. Take the 3DO Challenge. Unless of course you're too busy watching Disco Fever reruns.

3DO

3DO. THE MOST ADVANCED HOME GAMING SYSTEM IN THE UNIVERSE.

Experience the 3DO system at Babbage's, Electronics Boutique, G&G/Captron, Software Etc., Gamers Paradise and The Good Guys. For the name of a 3DO dealer, call 1-800-REAL-3DO.

HOTLINE

Ride The Digital Highway In Your Packard Bell

Packard Bell targeted the home user with a dramatic redesign that puts everything in one box. The Spectria line combines the computer with built-in monitor, CD-ROM, radio, TV, stereo, fax modem, and phone answering system. It should hit the technology hungry market in August.

The system features ease of set up, space-saving design, an environment-based interface, and decorator panels in three colors. It's overall size is about the same as a mid-sized television set, making it an easier fit in confined spaces.

Spectrias will come in a variety of 486 SX and DX configurations, operating at 25, 33, 50 or 66 MHz, with 4 or 8 MB of RAM expandable to 64 MB, 8KB cache memory, upgradeable to 512 KB, and 1MB of video memory expandable to 2 MB, and 14-in. SVGA monitor. It has a dual-speed CD-ROM drive that plays back audio, video, and computer data simultaneously. It's compatible with Photo-CD, and comes with a 16-Bit sound card. It has a restyled upgrade capability that promises "any skill level" can install components.

It will come packaged with a total of 27 software titles, including productivity and business software, reference and learning programs, entertainments, fax software and a Prodigy Service start-up kit.

The company will support the all-in-one users with toll-free assistance lines and messaging services on Prodigy and CompuServe.

Beny Alagem, CEO of Packard Bell, says, "Ten years ago everyone envisioned the home PC as a magic box that could replace other appliances. Packard Bell has delivered on that promise."

SEGA SPONSORS GHOSTWRITER

Sega will be the primary sponsor of *Ghostwriter*, the children's program that teaches children to read and write.

The program, going into its third season, is produced by Children's Television Workshop.

HI TECH GETS NEW MONIKER

Hi-Tech Expressions has changed its name to Hi-Tech Entertainment, Inc. According to CEO Henry Kaplan, the new name better reflects the nature of the business.

The company is expanding into PC and CD ROM software, and will market versions of Capcom and Acclaim video games, including **Mortal Kombat**, **NBA Jam**, **Super Street Fighter II**, and **Mega Man X**, for PC and CD-ROM.

TOP VIDEO GAMES FOR MAY, 1994

This list of top-selling video games was compiled by Babbages.

Top SNES Games
1. *Super Metroid*, Nintendo
2. *NBA Jam*, Acclaim
3. *Ken Griffey Jr. M.L. Baseball* Nintendo

As always, the popular genre of sports games dominates the lists, but **Super Metroid** proves that science fiction titles are always popular.

Top Sega Genesis Titles
1. *World Series Baseball*, Sega
2. *NBA Jam*, Acclaim
3. *Caesar's Palace*, Virgin

Top Sega CD
1. *Tomcat Alley*, Sega
2. *Dark Wizard*, Sega
3. *Dragon's Lair*, ReadySoft

Top 3DO
1. *Jurassic Park*, Universal
2. *Madden NFL Football*, EA Sports
3. *Out of This World*, Interplay

Babbages' newest hit list shows that 3DO players want big, flashy games, and even here, sports has a strong audience.

TOP COIN-OPS JUNE, 1994

Figures courtesy of **Replay Magazine**, based on an earnings-opinion poll of operators.

Best Upright Videos
1. *Mortal Kombat II*, Midway
2. *NBA Jam Tourn. Ed.*, Midway
3. *Virtua Fighter*, Sega

Best Deluxe Videos
1. *Ridge Racers*, Namco
2. *Daytona USA*, Sega
3. *Outrunners*, Sega

Best Coin-Op Software
1. *Dungeons & Dragons*, Capcom
2. *Raiden II*, Fabtek
3. *Samurai Shodown*, SNK

Best Pinball Machines
1. *Star Trek*, Williams
2. *Demolition Man*, Williams
3. *Addams Family*, Midway

Best New Games
1. *Last Bounty Hunter*, ALG
2. *Revolution X*, Midway
3. *Solitaire Challenge*, Dynamo

ALG's hitting their stride, here's another strong contender from the New Mexico company. Watch for all three of these in future month's charts.

SEGA BUILDS A BRIDGE

32-BIT "X" FACTOR DEBUTS

Sega of America's new bridge technology morphs existing Genesis systems to 32-Bit technology. The peripheral, dubbed the 32X, uses a pair of Hitachi 32-Bit RISC processors to upgrade Genesis technology to a par with state-of-the-art coin-op and black box systems.

Sega also announced that it is licensing QSound Virtual Audio technology for the 32X and any future Sega 32-Bit systems.

The 32X plugs directly into the Genesis cartridge slot and runs both Genesis and 32X carts, while also adding punch to the Sega CD. Slated to retail at the $150 price point, the 32X features Sega's SVP chip on-board, so even memory-intensive games should retail at the same price point as average Genesis carts.

Sega has over 30 32X titles in development. The first generation of software will include versions of **Virtua Racing**, **Doom**, and **Star Wars Arcade**, as well as several original projects, such as **Tempo**, **Metal Head**, and **Cyber Brawl**. However SoA spokesman Joe Miller was absolutely zipper-lipped on the subject of a possible **Virtua Fighters** translation.

DEVELOPERS SIGN ON FOR SEGA 32X

In a rush of industry support, 25 software companies committed to publishing software for the 32X. "The folks developing for 32X are among the who's who in the business..." said Chris Garske, Sega's group director for third party software development.

The list of companies includes the following: Absolute, Acclaim, Accolade, Activision, Capcom, Crystal Dynamics, Domark, GameTek, Hi Tech, Interplay, JVC, Konami, Playmates, Rocket Science, Software Toolworks, Sunsoft, Takara, Time Warner, Virgin, and about a dozen more.

GRIDDERS™

A 3DO EXPERIENCE

Because these blocks spell doom.
They're Gridders, and they make this the most unique adventure/puzzle game for 3DO.

REMEMBER YOUR FIRST SET OF BLOCKS?

Enter the mysterious Gridders Corporation factory, a true interactive 3D world you control. Manipulate the tumbling 3D automatons on 36 dangerous grid levels. Each with multiple solutions, each more challenging than the last. You must encounter deadly "technocutioners" and other agents of evil. Find and employ life-saving objects.

Listen to your bionic blood-hound Fidex.™ And learn how to use unusual devices. All in a relentless quest for a diabolical secret. CD quality music and dramatic animated sequences intensify this vivid, screen-popping 3D experience. Gridders is a test of guts and gray matter. One wrong move and you'll have to be scraped off the block with a shovel

THIS MAY BE YOUR LAST.

3DO

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Tetragon

GAME DOCTOR

High Definition Gaming

by THE GAME DOCTOR

As we prepare to ride our tricycles out onto the Superduper Information Highway, which crash helmet does the Doctor recommend?

That's what it's like being a game medic in these turbulent times.

Nonetheless, the Doctor will do his best to keep the constantly changing scene in focus

Q: OK, Doc, let's forget about which 32-Bit system I'm going to buy, whether to go 486 or Pentium, 3DO or Sony, etc. etc. etc. I have a simpler question, which is, what about High Definition TV? When that comes along in the next year or so, will ANY of the current systems run on it?

Also, is Magic Motion guru Don Iwerks related to the old Disney animator, Ub Iwerks?

Dan Splendin
El Paso, TX

A: *The Doc gets this question pretty regularly, but it deserves an update. Several years ago, the FCC decided that any high definition TV (HDTV) would have to be downwardly compatible with the current NTSC standard. This pretty much threw the HDTV folks into disarray, and after years of frustration the main players banded together last year to produce a single standard which would meet the FCC's approval.*

However, since the consortium has no plans to even present the standard to the FCC before next year, and since the technology will have to maintain some degree of standardization with NTSC, I wouldn't lose any sleep over this issue.

As to your second question, yes, Don Iwerks is the son of Ub Iwerks. And for the enlightenment of our readers, Don is the founder of Cinetropolis, which produces big screen movies (as a competitor to Imax), motion simulation rides and VR-type arcade attractions (such as ***Loch Ness Adventure****, first entry in the Virtual Adventure series). Ub Iwerks, his father, was one of the Disney Studio's first great animators, and later went on to found his own animation house.*

Q: I'm sick of this, Doc! I own both a Genesis and a SNES and I like the Genesis much better, except for one extremely annoying thing: the SNES plugs directly into my TV set, but the Genesis has no S-Video output! What do I do? Do I have to buy a JVC system or a Laser Active to get decent Genesis video?

Fred Kelly
Boulder, CO

A: *Rejoice, Fred, your hour of release is at hand. The new 32X bridge adapter for the Genesis is supposed to include S-Video output, so all*

ACCESS Brings You a Virtual World Interactive Movie!

What Reviewers Are Saying:

"Lots of games push the envelope—Under a Killing Moon blows it to smithereens!"
—William Trotter, PC Entertainment

"A ground breaking CD adventure!"
—Joyce Worley, Electronic Games

"Under a Killing Moon combines the best elements of movies and computer games... It literally pulls you into the screen."
—Denny Atkin, Entertainment Editor, Compute Magazine

This category-creating Interactive Movie from ACCESS Software goes light years beyond any other product labeled "interactive." *Under a Killing Moon* takes you to the streets of post World War III San Francisco and casts you into the role of Tex Murphy, Private Investigator, who first appeared in *Mean Streets*, then *Martian Memorandum*. *Under a Killing Moon* is a Virtual World full of people and places so richly detailed, you'll feel like you're actually there.

you'll have to do is run your Genesis carts through the 32X—which you'd be doing anyway.

As for the JVC X-Eye, while the Japanese version has an S-Video output, I don't believe the American version does. Fortunately, it won't be a problem anymore, eh, Fred?

Q: Who did the game **Aladdin** for the Genesis? It says Disney, and Virgin, and Sega—who made it? And why are the other names on there? Also, what does it mean when on a game like **NBA Jam** it says "Iguana Software"? I thought Acclaim made the game?

Leroy Richardson
Arlington Hts., IL

A: *You're just confusing functions, Leroy. It's like those movies that start with: "David Chucklehead presents a Darren Costajena production—Louis Picklefoot's 'Zsa Zsa: My Story'." On **Aladdin**, the game was developed at Virgin, with the assistance of Disney animators. Sega was the publisher. On **NBA Jam**, Acclaim is the publisher and Iguana developed it. Theoretically, it could get even more confusing. Virgin could have hired an outside development house, in which case there would have been* four *names on the box!*

Q&A Quickies: James Eagleton of Baltimore, MD, was hot to know which of its many cool licenses Viacom will be using as game material. As you probably know, James, Viacom owns MTV, Nickelodeon, Nick at Night, half of the Comedy Channel, and all of Paramount. Next up, however, after **Beavis & Butt-head** (with original games for both SNES and Genesis), Viacom will tackle Nickelodeon's *Guts!* They're also developing a game—and, in fact MTV has ordered a series—based on one of those weird little self-promotional "bumpers" that MTV runs. I can't say which one, cause I don't want to get dumped on by Viacom... We've gotten pretty good response on the Casting Call in which we asked you to present your dream casts for the upcoming *Street Fighter* film. Our two winners this month are Joe Boerner of Hayden, ID, and Sean Salisbury of Portland, ME.

Joe's cast includes Jeff Speakman as Ryu, Jean-Claude Van Damme as Ken; Tia Carrere (Wayne's gorgeous babe in Wayne's World) as Chun Li; Arnold Schwarzenegger as Zangief; Professor Toru Tanaka (from pro wrestling and films such as *Running Man*) as E. Honda; Lou Ferrigno as Blanka; Fisher Stevens (from the *Short Circuit* movies) as Dhalsim; Steve James (from the *American Ninja 1*, *2*, and *3*) as Balrog; David Bradley (he was in *American Ninja 3* and *4*) as Vega; and Michael Dudikoff (*American Ninja 1*, *2*, and *4*) as M. Bison.

Sean's cast has boxer/actor Tommy "the Duke" Morrison ("Tommy Gunn" from the last Rocky film) as Ken; Keanu Reeves (from *Point Blank* and *Speed*) as Ryu; Tia Carrere as Chun Li; Arnold as Zangief; Jack Palance (from the *City Slickers* films) as Dhalsim; a Henson puppet as Blanka; Dolph Lundgren as Guile; WWF wrestler Yokozuna as E. Honda; boxer Riddick Bowe as Balrog; Steven Seagal as Vega; basketball star Robert Parish as Sagat; and Sean Connery as M. Bison.

I liked these selections—especially Joe's choice of Ferrigno as Blanka—but think Tanaka is too old and too small for the Honda role. I prefer Sean's choice there. But Sean Connery as Bison? That's a stretch, even for Connery. And Palance is too old to play Dhalsim. By the way, I'm sure you noticed that they agreed on who should play Chun Li and Zangief. Interesting. In any case, game packets are being assembled as we speak. If there are any other especially good Casting Calls, we'll run them in future issues. For the moment, however, it's time to wrap things up for this installment and head on out to the jacuzzi. Send any Qs to: The Game Doctor (*EG*), 330 S. Decatur, Suite 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107.

I tell ya, that Superhighway is becoming a virtual jungle.

Until next time, happy gaming and keep the questions coming.

Aloha.

UNDER A
Killing Moon

Q: What do film stars *Brian Keith*, *Margot Kidder*, & *Russell Means* all have in common?

A: They all star in ACCESS Software's new CD thriller *Under a Killing Moon!*

Format: 2 CD's for MS-DOS

Coming Soon to a PC Near You!

4910 W. Amelia Earhart Dr.
Salt Lake City, UT 84116
1-800-800-4880

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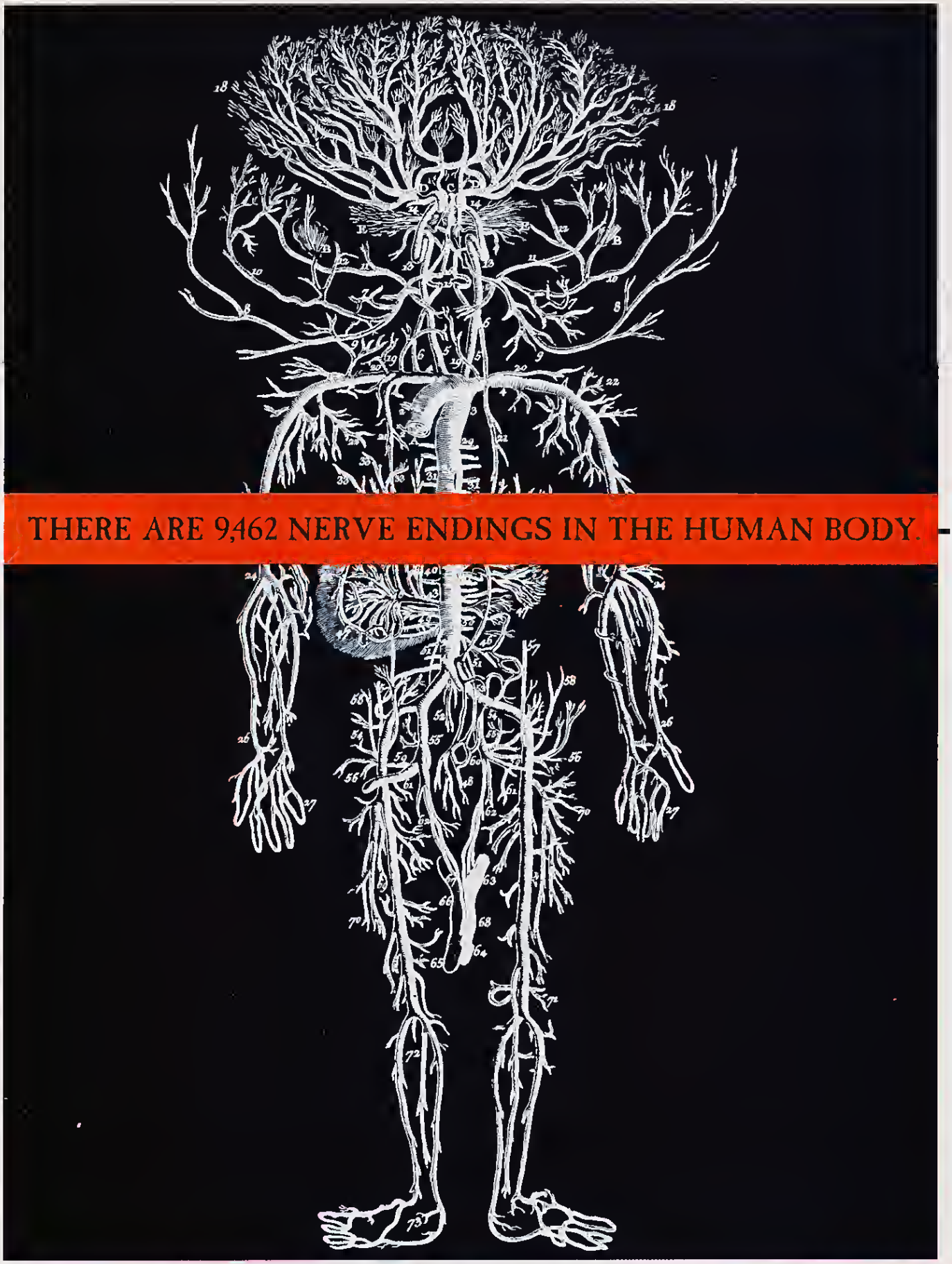

THERE ARE 9,462 NERVE ENDINGS IN THE HUMAN BODY.

Lin Divil™ ©1993 Gremlin Graphics Software Limited. ©1994 Philips Media. All rights reserved. Why the heck are you reading this? Don't you have better things to do than waste good nerve endings on stuff only lawyers are supposed to read? Obviously you need a Philips CD-i player.

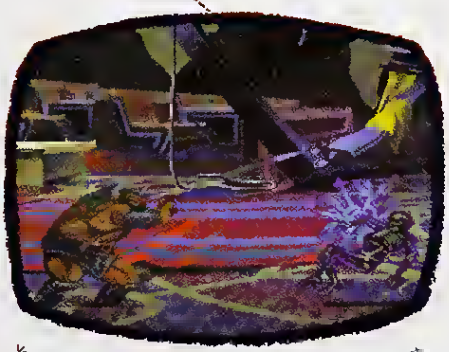
Burn Cycle

In this live action video/computer hybrid, you play Sol Cutter, data thief whose brain s been downloaded with a 24 hours-til-you re-dust computer virus Coming this fall on CD-i and CD ROM

WHY WASTE THEM ON "LOVE CONNECTION."

You are Mutt, a grumpy little hornhead wending your way through the treacherous Labyrinth of Chaos in search of the mystic pizza Coming this Summer on CD-i, CD ROM and PC Floppy (Optional Digital Video cartridge required for CD-i)

Litil Divil



Your job is to waste the mutants and hybrids who inhabit 10 post apocalyptic landscapes Expect to be taunted and teased by in your face animated foes Coming this fall on CD i (Optional Digital Video cartridge required)

Mutant Rampage: Body Slam

CD-i

Most of what's on TV can be summed up in one word: lobotomy. Which is why Philips has come up with three new exclusive games. All with retina-searing graphics and ear-bending sounds. Now that you know this, why just sit there when you have 9,462 anxious nerve endings just begging for the controls.

Now, for a mere $299, you can introduce your nervous system to the new Magnavox 450 CD-i player For more input, dial 800 824 2567

PHILIPS MEDIA

Toons Hit the Highway

Traveling the Rocky Road

by Bill Kunkel & Laurie Yates

Long before motion-capture technology, CD-ROM, and FMV opened the door between electronic gaming and Hollywood superstars, there were other celebrities making their way to the interactive arena. Before the likes of Sly Stallone, Wesley Snipes, Brian Keith, Margot Kidder, Tim Curry, and Kirk Cameron assigned their thespian talents to digital media, stars of a somewhat different magnitude comprised the recognizable faces on video and computer games.

That's right, it's those pen-and-ink personalities from the world of cartoons and comic books!

The World, the Flesh, and the Pencil

Comic book and cartoon stars were a perfect match for electronic game technology. For one thing, until the advent of CD-ROM, bit-mapped, sprite-based graphics were the driving force behind video and computer game graphics. Digitized images of real people consumed enormous amounts of memory, and were largely impractical in game development terms.

The popular stars of cartoons and comics, on the other hand, were rendered on paper, using essentially the same techniques as electronic game artists and designers.

Animated and comic book celebs had another strong advantage over human beings; they are frequently better known and established in the public's mind because they never age and rarely change, maintaining a fairly static visual persona over many, many years. Human stars, meanwhile, don't have such an extended lifespan. Moreover, they change constantly. While Paul Newman, Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, and Kathleen Turner all look very different today than they did when they started out in films, Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse, Spider-Man, and Wonder Woman have essentially maintained visual continuity over the course of decades.

Four-Color Fantasy: Comics Go Gaming

Comic book characters have been used in video and computer games since the earliest days of the Atari 2600. Because Warner Communications had an ownership interest in Atari, the first home video game giants had first licensing access to another giant Warner property: DC Comics.

As a result, Atari created **Superman**, one of the most successful of the second-generation 2600 titles. Also in the late '70s and early '80s, Scott Adams Adventure International, one of the top publishers of illustrated text adventures, acquired the computer rights to a long string of Marvel characters.

Since then, with home systems taking graphic capabilities through the roof, electronic adaptations of comic book characters have remained consistently popular. There have been several games based on the adventures of DC's Superman, but the most popular long underwear character in the business right now is the notorious Batman, thanks in large part to the success of the Tim Burton movies.

In fact, a situation has now developed in which two different artistic interpretations of the Caped Crusader have been independently licensed for electronic game conversion. The cinematic Batman, or Dark Knight version, has appeared most recently in Genesis, Sega CD, SNES, and PC games based on the film *Batman Returns* (Sega published both the Genesis and Sega CD editions, while Konami turned out the SNES and computer versions).

A second Batman, representing the more classical, comic book character, has also been acquired for interactive electronic translation. *Batman: The Animated Series*, a superb cartoon show, will be the subject of both a SNES (Konami) and Genesis (Sega) game.

One of the reasons comic book characters are such popular licenses these days has to do with the changing demographics of the video game business. With more and more frequency, publishers are looking for properties which are demographically suited to the mostly male, largely teenage hardcore video game audience.

Just as video game publishers have always advertised heavily in the pages of comic books, they have now turned to the crowded spandex-and-steroids crowd for an infusion of colorful, adolescent power fantasies and crossover marketing pizazz.

"The demographics for comic books and video games absolutely overlap," maintained Activision marketing veep Trish Wright. "Comic book and video game audiences both segment into age groups ranging from 8-year-olds to 24-34-year-olds. Activision is evaluating several comic book universes possibly for future comics-based games."

Not only are comic book characters demographically well-suited to electronic translation, they are additionally visually ideal, because of their colorful appearance and often huge and menacing physiques.

"We were searching for comic [book] licenses," explained Bob Botch of U.S. Gold, discussing his company's excellent platform game based on Marvel's Incredible Hulk. "The Incredible Hulk was appealing because the character is physically large, which is a visually attractive feature for [video] games. Also, his personality is suitable to video games, since his main activities are smashing and bashing. Also, his world is well populated with enemies, which is also very good in the realm of video game ideals."

Of course, working with a licensor can be a challenge to say the least, especially when they are protecting a visually distinctive property. Marvel, however, is a veteran player in this game. "They were very easy to work with," Botch confirmed. "Marvel's done numerous games and they're understandably protective and cautious about their livelihood. But they're great players, and they like to give input."

What were the ground rules working with the comic book giant? "Marvel gave us all the criteria up front, so that made it easier. Also, Marvel themselves did the art work on the package and documentation."

In fact, Marvel now has an entire Custom Comics Division to create specialty publications, and provide support on projects such as U.S. Gold's **Incredible Hulk**. After all, who is better suited to drawing Marvel characters than Marvel artists? Also, when the comic book licensor produces accompanying art, it saves the game publisher the long and often arduous approval process, since anything the licensor provides is automatically approved.

When Is a Comic Book License NOT a Comic Book License?

One of the more interesting and controversial phenomena in the wake of modern licensing is represented by the various Alien vs. Predator games which have turned up in arcades and home systems alike.

Dark Horse Comics went to Fox and licensed both the Alien and the Predator characters for an original comic book series dubbed, appropriately enough, *Alien vs. Predator*. However, when Activision and, more recently, Capcom created SNES and coin-op versions, respectively, of the property, Dark Horse was not in the licensing loop.

"Dark Horse had no input [into the development of the SNES game], since Fox actually owns the rights to the characters," explained Activision marketing veep Trish Wright. "Tom Sloper, an Activision producer, is a comics aficionado who knows the books well. He worked with the developers on the story line."

Similarly, Capcom went directly to Fox in order to secure the rights to an original coin-op. "It was much easier that way," explained Capcom's Alex Jimenez. "Fox gave us quite a bit of latitude in creating the new types of Aliens and things like that."

There are also plenty of other comic book superstars slated for cyberspace translation.

Capcom signed an agreement with Marvel revealed Laurie Thornton of Capcom "We'll be bringing our **Punisher** coin-op to the Genesis by the fourth quarter [Christmas], and we'll be developing an **X-Men** coin-op which will then be taken to the Nintendo platforms."

Animate This!

Cartoons, meanwhile, remain enormously popular among electronic game producers as both original subjects and licensed properties. Characters such as Accolade's Bubsy Bobcat, Sega's Sonic the Hedgehog, and Nintendo's Mario Brothers are all original cartoon-style characters who made the jump from video games to animated TV stardom.

Of course, the more traditional route has established cartoon characters making the transition from animation to electronic games. This category can be divided into traditional favorites (Disney's characters, Looney Toons, etc.) and modern stars (Beavis & Butt-head, Simpsons, Animaniacs, etc.).

The classic characters are well represented in Capcom's **The Great Circus Mystery starring Mickey and Minnie Mouse** for the SNES. While many developers categorize Disney as the most difficult-to-work-with licensor in the business, Capcom is used to working with the world's most famous animation studio. Capcom was the first developer to work with Disney in the modern video game era on **Mickey Mouse Capades** for the NES.

"Disney's standards are extremely high," acknowledged Capcom's Laurie Thornton, "because they have to maintain the integrity of the property. It's a much longer process, but it ends up as a win-win situation as the [ultimate] product is of a high quality."

"Disney and Capcom worked hand-in-hand on the [SNES] **Aladdin** project. We had daily conversations and meetings. It was a different level of collaboration than their work with Virgin [for the Genesis **Aladdin**], but Disney was involved to the same degree. We just didn't utilize the actual animation."

Capcom has still more Disney crossovers in its immediate future, including the SNES version of the new Disney cartoon series, *Bonkers* (Sega is producing the Genesis version). The game stars Bonkers D. Bobcat, a former cartoon star turned cop, along with Fall Apart Rabbit, Toots, and Lucky Pickel. The plot revolves around the theft of three priceless artifacts from the Toon Museum: the sorcerer's hat work by Mickey Mouse in *Fantasia*, the genie's lamp from *Aladdin*, and the Little Mermaid's voice, now trapped in a clam shell. Gamers will also encounter a series of familiar guest stars, including Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Alice, and the Mad Hatter.

Classic cartoons continue to be viable license subjects. Sega, for example, will soon be releasing Genesis and Game Gear titles starring Taz, Warner Brothers' Tazmanian Devil, and the ever popular Road Runner and his pal Wile E. Coyote.

Contemporary Toons

But as popular as the classics may be, it is the modern animated stars who keep game sales thriving and prospering.

Acclaim has built an impressive franchise, for example, around its **Simpsons** series, which has been almost exclusively generated by Sculptured Software. So how tough is Matt Groening to work with?

"We maintain his standards," said Sculptured's Jeff Peters. "He's a stickler for keeping true to what he and Fox believe the Simpsons' world to be. Groening is very involved and approves all artwork and character actions."

Sculptured has also worked on another popular toon adaptation, **Ren & Stimpy: Time Warp** for T*HQ, working under the protective eye of Nickelodeon/MTV owner Viacom. "This was a fun project," Peters reported, "but I wish there'd been time to add more."

"Viacom, for the most part, was extremely interested in [the treatment of its property]. They liked the storyboards and didn't really change or ask to change any element. The real difficulties were more political. Viacom sees Ren & Stimpy as fun-loving, happy, and positively interacting. The rest of us see the vile, realistic side of the characters.

"This was definitely a creative conflict. Viacom seems to be turning to an anti-violence philosophy. They're becoming more puzzle and quest-oriented, and you won't see a lot of high action. Personally, as an outsider [Sculptured didn't work on either version], I'm disappointed with the **Beavis & Butt-head** games, because there's no devious behavior that people associate with Beavis & Butt-head.

"Taking cartoon and comic book characters to video games is a good trend, provided the public gets what they expect. Companies must find out what the public wants and then give it to them. For example, you'll never see Mickey Mouse with a submachine gun, because that's not what the public wants. "However, Ren with the gun, well..." Jeff's voiced trailed off as he thought of the possibilities of that idea.

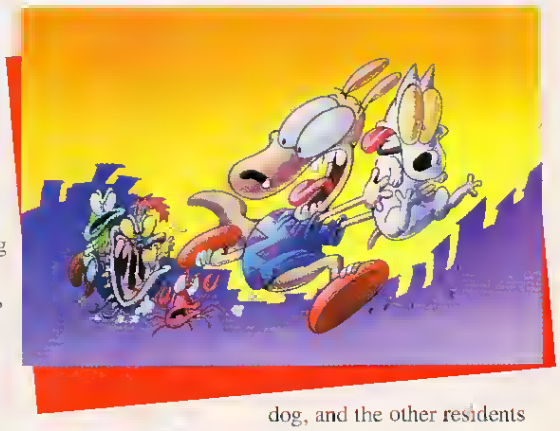
Viacom is now producing its own video games based on captive licenses. The debut release was based on Joe Murray's brilliant Nickelodeon cartoon, *Rocko's Modern Life*, with a pair of Beavis & Butt-head games also headed to the SNES and Genesis [see "This Game Rules!: The Beavis & Butt-head Story"].

"We started developing Rocko as a video game as soon as Nickelodeon started the show," observed Viacom New Media's Al Nilsen. "And the game developers worked very closely with the TV animators.

"The excitement level was the reason the game got done so quickly; everybody was excited, because it's pretty unusual to bring a video game and a TV show to life simultaneously."

Rocko's Modern Life: Spunky's

Dangerous Day for the SNES is a puzzle-driven recreation of the cartoon which details the day-to-day life of a sad sack wallaby, his dog, and the other residents of the bizzarro-art deco hamlet of O-Town. While animator Murray was developing the actual series on the West Coast, Viacom New Media producer David Marsh assembled a team of artists, designers, and programmers to produce the video game version in Chicago. The two teams were coordinated out of Viacom HQ in New York City, with input from Nickelodeon. As a result, as soon as Murray's team developed new characters, plot lines, etc., they were instantly communicated to Chicago and integrated into the video game.



Konami too, has bought the rights to *Tiny Toon Adventures*, *Animaniacs*, and *Batman: The Animated Series*. All three licenses are held by Warner Communications.

"We like the fact that all three properties have an older, hipper following, while simultaneously appealing to kids; they're A-plus licenses," explained Konami's Randy Severin. "Demographics are important, and we look for an appeal factor for ages six to 17."

Gamers can look forward to many years of animated and comic book characters as staples of their electronic entertainment.

EG PREVIEW:

Disney's Beauty & the Beast

When an arrogant prince is visited by an enchantress disguised as a pauper, he callously turns down her request for shelter. In response, the sorceress casts a spell on the prince, transforming him into a lion-headed beast, and all his servants into household objects.

As she leaves him, the enchantress offers the Beast a chance at redemption—if he can find a woman he truly loves, and who loves him in return, before his 21st birthday, the awful spell will be broken.

The Beast must scale a number of walls and obstacles in his search to find true love.

Thus begins **Beauty & the Beast**, one of the most beloved fairy tales ever written, as well as the subject of a smash animated film by Disney. This SNES version of the saga from Hudson Soft is easily the best video game retelling of the story ever produced.

Presented in side-scrolling platform format, with 12 levels, real-time light sourcing, and a wonderful recreation of the Oscar-winning film score, **Disney's Beauty & the Beast** will delight fans of the movie, as well as animation devotees in general.

Each game screen features a belljar containing a freshly bloomed rose. As time winds down, the rose withers, indicating how much play time remains. Other special features include a Roar command—when the Beast lets out a mighty growl, it freezes enemies in their tracks for several seconds—and a magic mirror which reveals future obstacles to the player.

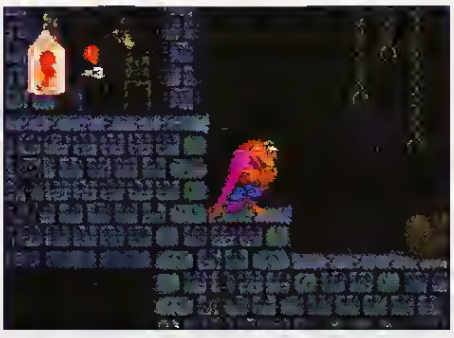
Real-time light sourcing adds to the overall dark and dank atmosphere of a large castle.

Other special powers include a Stomp, and a Super Stomp, both of which are executed by pressing the down control on the directional control following a normal or extended leap.

The various levels take the player-character from dungeons to various rooms of the Beast's castle, out into the snow-covered forest to a fantastic rooftop finale in which the Beast battles Gaston for both his life and the love of Beauty, whose love can break the spell that keeps him trapped as a monster.

The game largely follows the plot of the film, with an emphasis on the Beast (as the player-character), rather than Beauty. The game elements comprise both action (the Beast battles everything from spiders and rats to animated portraits) and puzzle solving (largely kinetic brainteasers, in which the player-character must get to a seemingly inaccessible portion of the screen by manipulating objects within the location).

The use of real-time light sourcing adds a layer of soft beauty to the entire graphics presentation. Whether toiling in the candlelit library, or battling voracious wolves in the wintry forests, the lush colors and skillful use of shadows adds a layer of textured realism to the Beast's adventures. For example, when the Beast moves closer to Lumiere (a former servant who was transformed into a candelabra by the enchantress), the lighting on the screen visible swells and brightens, when he moves away, the light gently dims down.



Side-scrolling graphics move very fluidly while walking slowly or running.

Despite the game's obvious demographic appeal to younger players, **Disney's Beauty & the Beast** is well worth investigating for anyone who has ever loved a good fairy tale, animation, or beautiful video game graphics. *(Bill Kunkel & Laurie Yates)*

U.S. GOLD

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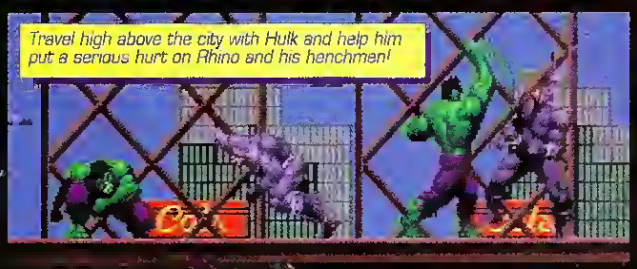

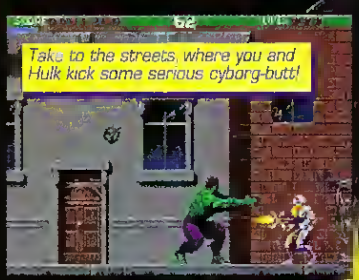

COME ON... IF YOU THINK YOU'RE TOUGH ENOUGH!

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EG PREVIEW:

The Ren & Stimpy Show: Time Warp

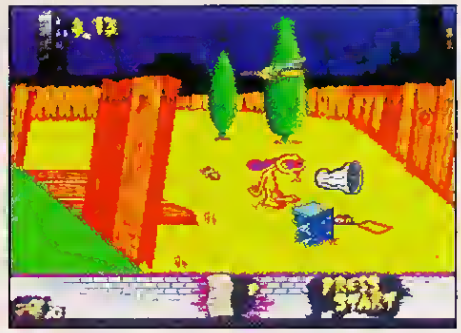
Happy, happy! Joy, joy! Those gross-out funny animals from Nickelodeon are back in **The Ren & Stimpy Show: Time Warp**, from T*HQ for the SNES.

The game, which was developed by Sculptured Software, manages to do an impressive job of recreating the misanthropic world of our two beloved animated stars within the context of a side-scrolling platform contest with extensive lateral movement.

The opening scenes revolve around the run-down yard and trailer of Ren & Stimpy.

The story has Ren and Stimpy collecting 47 million proofs of purchase from Gritty Kitty products. The proofs, which are scattered in the trailer home, earn the duo an exotic premium: a time machine!

The Gritty Kitty challenge was laid down by the current owner of the time machine, Muddy Muddskipper, and he's not happy to learn that it's been met. Although he surrenders the machine, he immediately sets out to steal it back.



Ren must swat mosquitoes away to survive the unfriendly confines of the backyard.

The opportunity for the theft arises pretty quickly, as Ren and Stimpy become lost during their first time jaunt and an opportunistic Muddskipper seizes the time machine. It's up to our heroes, and the gamer, to diminish the percentage of Muddy Muddskipper contamination to the point where they can retrieve the time machine and zip ahead to the next level, where the process is repeated.

Gamers can choose to play **Time Warp** as either Ren or Stimpy, or two players can cooperate to reach the different time zones, which include the Haunted House, Monkey See, Monkey Don't, and the Untamed World.

The appropriately nonsensical plot line, the various levels, and character animations are all in keeping with the TV show's wacked out ambiance. Both Ren & Stimpy are rendered as large sprites capable of generating the stylized reactions and double-takes so familiar and loved by the fans of the show.

What would a **Ren & Stimpy** game be without violence? Why, it would hardly be Ren & Stimpy at all. However, as this is a SNES game, much of the mayhem occurs off-screen and is presented in terms of reaction shots by the player-character(s) or as comic book-style fight scenes, with huge sound effects spelled out on-screen (pow, crash, thump, etc.).

There are super attacks, team attacks, and special object power-ups, as well as passcodes which are salted about the various levels.

The game itself, however, is actually a collection of mini games. In The Backyards, Ren and Stimpy must scrounge the neighborhood for those proofs of purchase; The Big City sends a series of wild and crazy obstacles and enemies against our heroes, including falling walruses, seagulls, Crockostimpies (don't ask), the Fire Chief, and the boss Zookeeper.

Once the Zookeeper has been handily taken care of, Ren and Stimpy are awarded their time machine, which Ren pilots, with Stimpy manning the Toast Weapons. They must maneuver the machine through a time tunnel as well as a maze of time portals.

Having rid the area of hostile flying objects with a fly swatter, Ren prepares to move on.

The next game up is The Haunted House, in which Ren and Stimpy journey through a graveyard and a mausoleum, battling bats, ghosts, and ghouls along the way. At the conclusion of this level, the time machine reappears and takes the player-characters to the next level.

In Monkey See, Monkey Don't, Ren and Stimpy find themselves locked up in a monkey cage and must locate the key in order to escape from the zoo, our heroes move across a primeval landscape full of volcanoes, falling lava, and pesky seagulls. Our team supreme must somehow find their way through caves and past a maze of islands to the game's final scene.

Fans of the Nickelodeon series may find **Ren & Stimpy** somewhat less violent and disgusting than usual, but the sound, graphics, and play action are remarkably faithful to the source material.

(Bill Kunkel & Laurie Yates)

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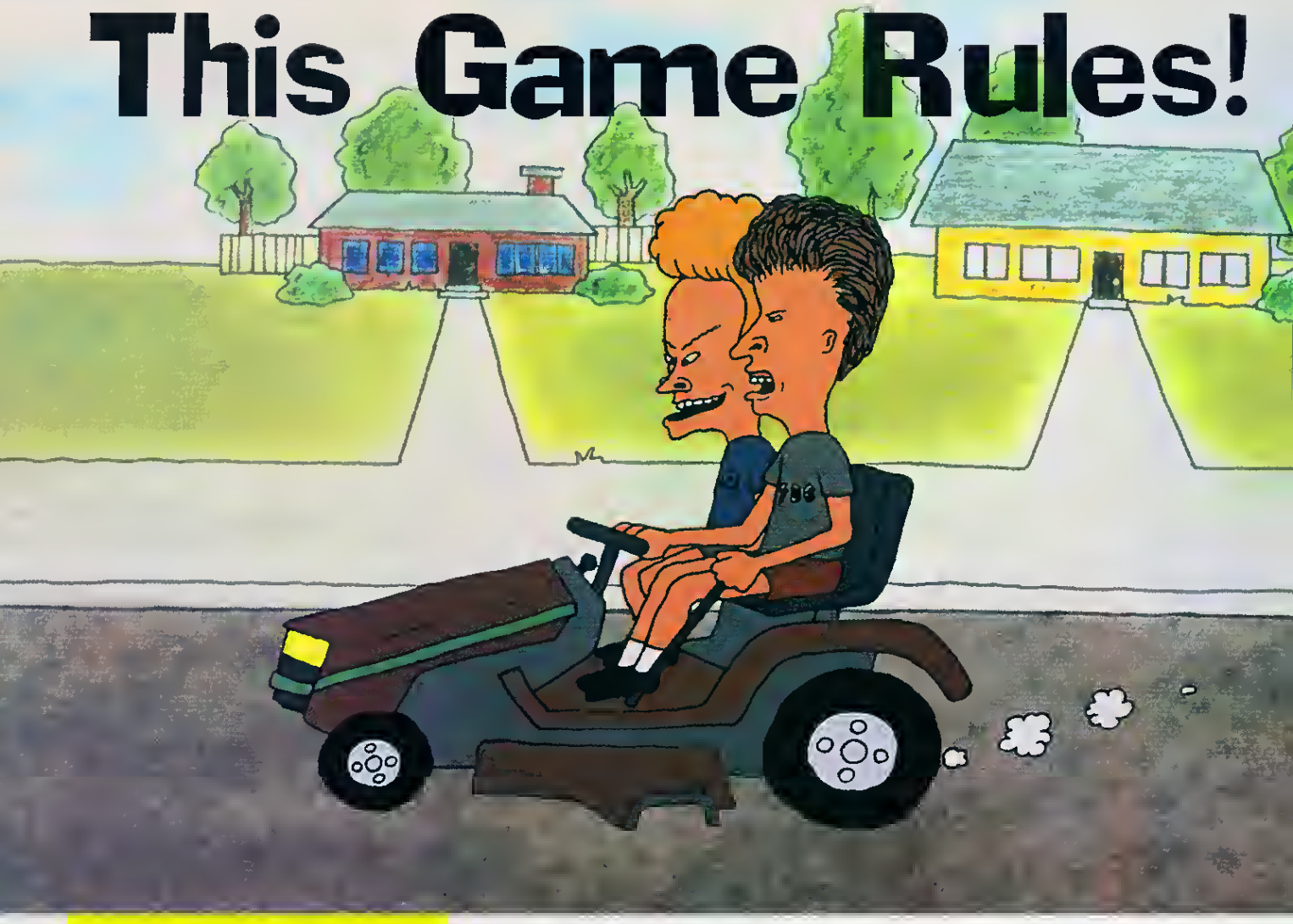
This Game Rules!



The Beavis & Butt-head Story

"Hey, Butt head, what *is* this?"
"Uhhhhhhhhhhhh I dunno "
"Looks like words or something In a magazine."
"Uhhhhhhhhhhhh _ OK "
"You wanna read it?"
"Heh heh Heh heh heh. You said 'read'."
"Heh heh Heh heh heh heh heh "
"Heh heh heh heh heh heh heh "

They speak to the adolescent, inner moron in all of us (well, some of us, anyway).

Beavis & Butt-head are the ultimate representatives of the Slacker Generation, a pair of high school-age dimwits living lives of loud desperation, seeking any avenue of escape from the ennui of everyday existence. They represent neither good nor evil, but rather a form of elemental chaos; they revel in snow storms, tornadoes, and blackouts because they represent a change in the norm. And since the norm really "sucks," any deviation from it is automatically and systematically "cool."

Beavis & Butt-head are the perfect karmic payback to a society that defines itself largely through bad music videos, mountains of fast food, and old sitcom reruns.

In short, Beavis & Butt-head are ideally suited to star in their own video game, which they will be doing this summer and fall, courtesy Viacom New Media.

They Came from MTV

The Mike Judge-created cartoon tandem first sprang to life on MTV, where they continue to appear twice nightly (plus early morning reruns). It was only natural, therefore, that when MTV's owner, Viacom (which also holds the mortgage on Nickelodeon, Nick at Night, one half of The Comedy Channel, and Paramount Studios, among other entertainment wellsprings) decided to get into the video game business, the braintrust turned to one of its most notorious and successful properties as one of the initial releases.

Beavis & Butt-head, the game, is actually two games, with the SNES and Genesis versions not only employing diverse subjects, but significantly different treatments, as well. The SNES game, for example, is a fairly standard platform contest, with our intellectually flyweight heroes running amok at Highland High and other TV-based locations. The Genesis version, meanwhile, is far more ambitious, with a strong adventure game underpinning, and a minimum of societal carnage (suffice it to say that the boys won't be setting fires or playing frog baseball in *either* version).

"Basically, we wanted to give the developers an opportunity to utilize their creativity," explained Viacom's marketing veep, Al Nilsen, of the decision to farm out the projects to a pair of different developers. "The Genesis and SNES games are [even based on] different episodes" of the infamous animated series.

What's the Story?

The plot line of the more interesting Genesis version begins with Beavis & Butt-head scoring a prized pair of tickets to a Gwar concert. (For the unenlightened, Gwar is a headbanger rock group who dress up in fantastic, film-quality monster drag.)

Unfortunately, before the boys can even finish harmonizing on the opening chords to

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- 8 Megs of excellent cartoon quality graphics!
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- Baaed on the hit Hanna-Barbera television show!

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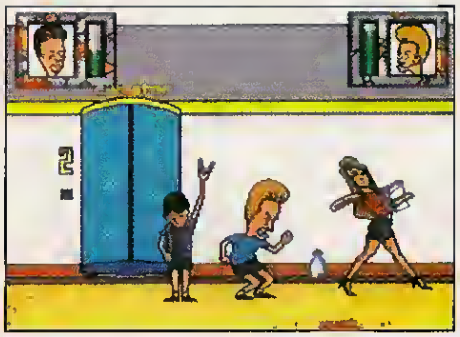
"Iron Man" in celebration, their goofy neighbor, Mr. Anderson, accidentally shreds the ducats. First his poodle tears them apart, then he unwittingly runs over the mangled remains with his lawn mower, sending Gwar ticket confetti spewing all over the tiny town of Highland. (That's right, we said 'spew.')

Pop-up word windows will appear when the boys attempt to communicate with others.

The search for the jigsaw ticket shards takes our heroes to a series of locales which will be quite familiar to fans of the series. These locations are accessed through a thematically ideal interface: the player joins Beavis & Butt-head as they squat on their familiar couch, channel surfing. The player selects a destination from the various options which appear on the boys' TV: the drive-in, mall, school, hospital, and, of course, Burger World, the only fast food emporium so desperate for labor that it actually pays Beavis & Butt-head to work there.

The idea of our infamous heroes using clues to solve puzzles is even funnier than watching them attempt one-armed push-ups in gym class, so it'll be up to the gamer to get those tickets back together before Gwar runs out of latex, sculpting foam and oversized props.



Enjoyment can be derived from even the most mundane of tasks–picking up bottles.

Naturally, the Genesis edition also features its fair share of action and adventure, with the characters' health monitored by "Conscious Meters" that gauge B&B's relative states of awareness (talk about micro-measurement!). There's even a "Sucks" button that the player can access to remove them from any scenario which is becoming too tedious.

There is no doubt, however, that some fans of the duo will find even the Genesis version somewhat bland and overly sanitized, especially when compared to an actual Beavis & Butt-head cartoon. While the bad boys of MTV still get into their fair share of trouble, the deviant, destructo side of their personalities is definitely short-changed. The Genesis game even includes an environmental twist, as the stars can earn money by collecting and recycling empty glass bottles. Somehow, it's difficult to imagine Beavis & Butt-head being environmentally pro-active, even in the pursuit of filthy lucre.

Interfacing with Beavis

The game uses a fairly simple interface, in keeping with the IQ levels of its stars. Head shots of Beavis & Butt-head appear in individual windows at the top of the screen, indicating which character the gamer is currently controlling and their relative health status. Additional pop-up windows display inventory items and any funds the two may have.

The SNES version, meanwhile, which is due out by fall, carries on in a more straight-ahead, side-scrolling tradition. The boys cavort through the corridors of Highland High School and other series-based locations. The action is more innocuous, in deference to Nintendo's delicate sensibilities, and, of course, there is no "Sucks" button. On the other hand, the SNES game has greater physicality, and may actually prove more appealing to the Beavis & Butt-head generation.

Viacom Dios

The beauty of Viacom's situation is that the same company that created the original property is overseeing the creation and development of the actual video game(s).

But while the game is visually faithful to its source material, the world created by Mike Judge has some very large holes in it that remain to be an unanswered mystery to all the Beavis and Butt-head fans across the country. Judge doesn't seem to be in a big hurry to fill them in either. For example, it has never been established exactly *where* Beavis & Butt-head are sitting when they watch all those rank rock videos. Is it Beavis' home (if he really has one) or is it the humble dwelling of the Butt-head family? Mike Judge himself either isn't sure, or at least has thus far avoided giving a public answer. (Best bet: Butt-head's; in at least one cartoon, he refers to the place as "my house.")

What about Butt-head's real name? And is 'Beavis' a first or second name? Even when the boys' stressed-out principal looks them up in the school yearbook, the boys are identified only by their single monickers.

Don't look real hard, the video games will not be answering these questions, or any of the other long-standing questions about MTV's most notorious bad boys. On the other hand, the designers, MTV, and the show's creators all worked hand-in-glove to make sure the electronic representation was true to the look and feel of the original artwork.

"The people who work on the show at MTV and the game developers work very closely," said Nilsen. "In this case [**Beavis & Butt-head**], there were four groups [involved]: the Beavis & Butt-head TV show designers, MTV personnel, game designers, and consumers. So there's a close association."

Consumers?

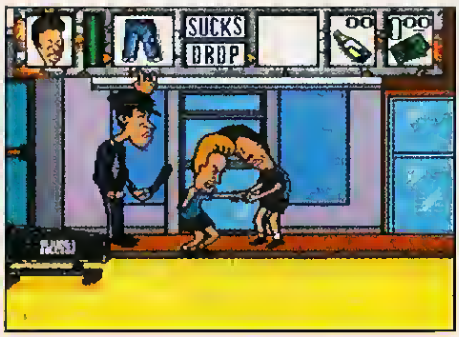
"We wanted the game to be as cool as the show," Nilsen explained, "so we brought in consumers to run consistency checks. You know: 'Is this cool?'"

Is it cool? How could *any* electronic game involving such a hilarious circus of eclectic characters including, the stars of the show Beavis and Butt-head, the demented Mr. Buzzcut, Billy Bob, the dimwitted Mr. Anderson (and poodle), Gwar, and the rest of the cast of TV's rudest animated series be anything *but* cool?

(You said 'Butt'–ed.)

We're there, dude.

(Bill Kunkel & Laurie Yates)



A menu bar at the top will indicate the assets and losses the boys have incurred.

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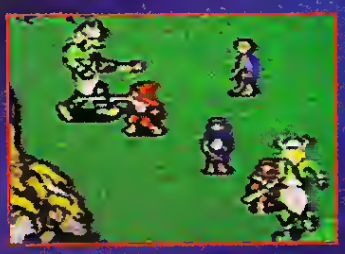

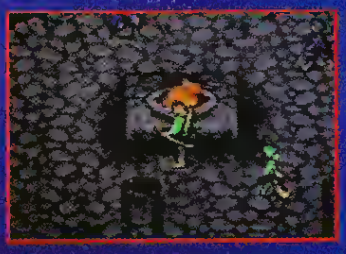

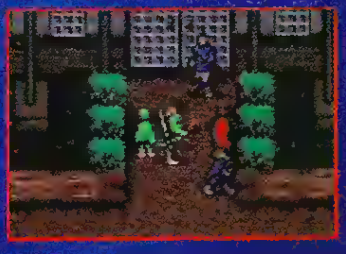

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WOMEN IN GAMING

GIRLS, GAMES, AND GENUINE GRIPES
Are Video Games Widening the Gender Gap?

by Steve Kent

Is technology widening the gender gap? Has cyberspace become just another ole boys' club? There is substantial evidence pointing to growing male dominance in the computer industry. According to many experts, electronic games are part of the problem.

Statistics readily support many of the accusations. Male dominance can be found in every aspect of the computer industry, from programming all the way through education. Nearly 75 percent of computer science majors are men. An even more telling statistic is that, of the millions of experienced PC users in America, an estimated 85 percent of these people are men.

Concern about the growing gender gap in cyberspace has spilled over to the electronic game industry. Most children play video games years before using conventional computers. A recent survey showed that more children recognize Mario than Mickey Mouse.

Pointing out that most video games are written for boys by programming teams made up of men, some educators and psychologists worry that young girls are becoming technology shutouts. According to a corporate survey, men account for 82 percent of Super Nintendo sales and use. Similar surveys at Sega show that out of their huge audience 80 percent of all Sega Genesis users are male.

"Video games are often violent and aggressive," says Deanne Evans, co-chair of the Washington Chapter of the National Organization for Women's task force to end violence against women. "Fighting games like **Mortal Kombat** are all over the sales charts. Most of the games written for girls have been pretty demeaning. We've heard about a Barbie game in which the player helps Barbie find her way through a shopping mall. It didn't do well and probably didn't deserve to."

This year Sunsoft plans to conduct a survey identifying the elements of gaming that appeal to female players. "I'm anxious to see what the surveys tell us. My theory is that girls are attracted to role-playing and search-seeking games," says Zimmerer. "Boys are more into highly interactive games."

Zimmerer admits that girls are not as interested in fighting games as boys, though she says there are girls who play games like **Street Fighter II**. "We've developed a line of games using Warner Brothers characters that appeal to both boys and girls. Bugs Bunny and the Tazmanian Devil aren't just for boys. We're also releasing Scooby-Doo."

> "Some educators and psychologists worry that girls are becoming technology shutouts"

Working to fill the gap

"We would like to attract more girls to the market," says Rita Zimmerer, formerly the executive vice president and general manager of Sunsoft. During her tenure with Sunsoft, Zimmerer was arguably the highest ranking female executive in the electronic game industry. Zimmerer arranged the acquisition of licenses to produce games based on popular characters from Warner Brothers cartoons.

"It's ridiculous to say that game manufacturers aren't interested in attracting girls. That's like saying we don't want to double our business," says Zimmerer. "On a worldwide basis, including Russia and China, interactive multimedia will be a trillion dollar industry. Companies are trying to get their part of the pie by giving customers what they want."

Mortal Kombat is an example of a game that draws a definite line in its gender attraction.

Like Sunsoft, American Laser Games has taken stock of the potential market. This fall they plan to release **Dream Date**, a live-action interactive game for girls. "We took all of the things girls love and put them into a live motion picture," says Patricia Grebe of American Laser Games.

"In **Dream Date**, girls submerge in a fantasy world and stay there as long as they want. This is a high spirited fantasy in which girls can play different parts and not lose momentum." With the game still months from release, Grebe could only reveal that **Dream Date** was targeted for girls ages 8 through 14, and that work has already begun on a sequel.

Game manufacturers have found that there is more to making games than just creating female characters. As noted earlier, Barbie did poorly in the stores. A number of Disney games, including Sunsoft's **Beauty and the Beast**, Sega's **Ariel, the Little Mermaid**, and High Tech Expression's **Mickey's Ultimate Challenge**, have let players choose between male and female characters in relatively non-violent games. Though these games have sold reasonably well, there is no evidence that they have lured more girls into the market.

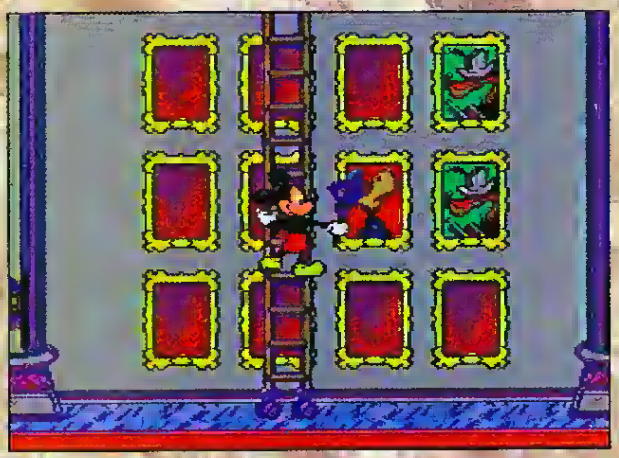
Nintendo and Sega

For its part, Nintendo has worked hard publicizing Samus, the female star of **Super Metroid**. Nintendo circulated posters, life-sized cut-out figures, and numerous press releases highlighting Samus in the hope of generating more interest among feminine audiences. Samus began blasting Metroids in 1988, years before the controversy over gender.

Of all of the companies involved in video game marketing, Sega has taken the most aggressive stance. Known for male-targeted sports games, Sega has created a task force to evaluate ways to attract more girls.

"There are a lot of issues to consider," says Michealene Cristini Risley, Sega's group director of licensing and character development. "It's not so clear cut. We've always done an interpretation of what girls want rather than asking them directly. If we really want to attract girls to play, we have to start by challenging all of the myths."

Risley points to both genetic and learned differences between boys and girls as one of the barriers. "Boys are better at detecting subtle differences in light, tasks involving depth perception, and certain motor skills. Contrary to what people may think, heroes do not have to be male to interest boys. Over half of the audience of *Clarissa Explains*, a children's show on Nickelodeon, is male."



According to Risley, Sega's desire to bring in more female players is paramount. "It's a gamble. We've hired educational consultants to run focus groups. We're spending money developing new games that will appeal to both boys and girls. There are 16 million girls in the

WOMEN IN GAMING

age groups that we want to reach."

"So far we have found that girls prefer non-linear games. They like to roam freely and explore the entire field of play. Games that allow you to move at your own pace and finish the different levels in any order will appeal to girls. They also do quite well with games that have small precise hand motions. Girls tend to enjoy games like **Tetris** and **Columns**."

Benefits of video game equality

While record numbers of households now have computers, nearly twice as many homes have video game consoles. One-third of all American residences, or roughly 32 million, have computers. By contrast, Sega and Nintendo have sold over 81 million game systems nationwide. (This figure reflects NES, SNES, Game Boy, Genesis, and Game Gear sales.) Many homes in the nation have two or even three different game systems on hand to play. Even adjusting for homes with several systems, the number of game systems is far greater than the number of computers.

Despite obvious differences between running a word processor and playing a game of **Sonic the Hedgehog**, important similarities exist. Ignoring the sophisticated graphics, a video game is like any other desktop environment. Whether the main character in a game looks like a rodent, a space ship, or a martial artist, it is really just a glorified cursor similar to cursors used in most computer environments. By the same token, joysticks and game pads work like the computer mouse.

Playing games teaches people how to translate hand movements into precise mouse movements. It also teaches you how to respond to and manipulate images on a computer monitor. Whether you're helping Mario destroy the Koopas or designing a jet engine in CAD, knowing how to relate to a computer monitor is essential in the process.

Familiarity with technology is the biggest benefit of playing video games. Computers scare people. They are mysterious, both fragile and menacing. The first step to learning to use a computer is becoming comfortable with it. Video games tend to demystify computers. Even though computers are used for more than playing games, the initial introduction given by the games makes the process of learning to use a computer much less frightening.

Reasonable partners

When people say video games, more often than not they refer to Sega and Nintendo. They have found a place in more than half of all American homes. Because of their stature, objections to the electronic game industry are often labeled as problems caused by Nintendo or Sega. The complaint that children spend too much time playing video games was nicknamed the "Nintendo Phenomena." When analysts characterized the 'Sega version' of **Mortal Kombat** as the symbol of video game violence, few stopped to explain that Acclaim, not Sega, had published the game.

Now that gender equality is the hot topic, critics are quick to point out that there are more video games written for boys than for girls. In a recent article in *Newsweek*, Barbara Kantrowitz pointed to Nintendo's hand-held game system and stated that, "They don't call it Game Boy for nothing."

While Sega and Nintendo do not have perfect records, they have been more responsible than many critics are willing to acknowledge. The music industry has been arguing the constitutionality of a rating system for more than six years. Sega and Nintendo each agreed to adopt a voluntary rating system within months of the congressional suggestion. By the same token, both companies have demonstrated a desire to attract more female players.

"It's high time that critics stopped to recognize how responsive Sega and Nintendo have been to public concerns," according to Steven Baxter, software reviewer for CNN *Future Watch*. "Sega created a voluntary video game rating system to alert parents to game contents. When it came to **Mortal Kombat,** Nintendo opted to take the high road even before the big storm began. Now that the focus is on involving girls in games, Nintendo can point its powerful finger to strong female characters in some of their most popular and successful games, and Sega has created a task force to create games that attract girl players."

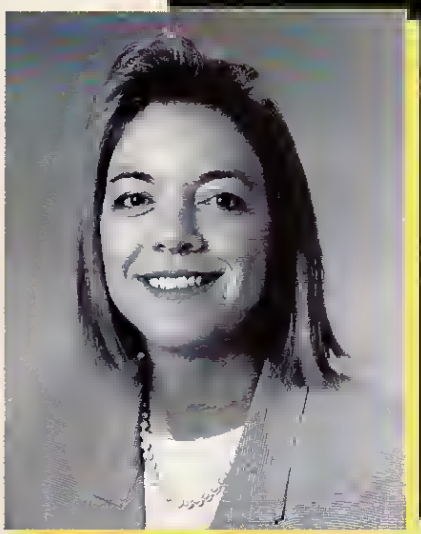
Rita Zimmerer

Rita Zimmerer joined Sunsoft as director of sales in 1989. Three months later she was promoted to vice president of sales and marketing. A few years later she was promoted to executive vice president and general manager. Before leaving the company, in 1994, Zimmerer oversaw the release of such big selling games as **Taz-Mania** and **Death Valley Rally**.

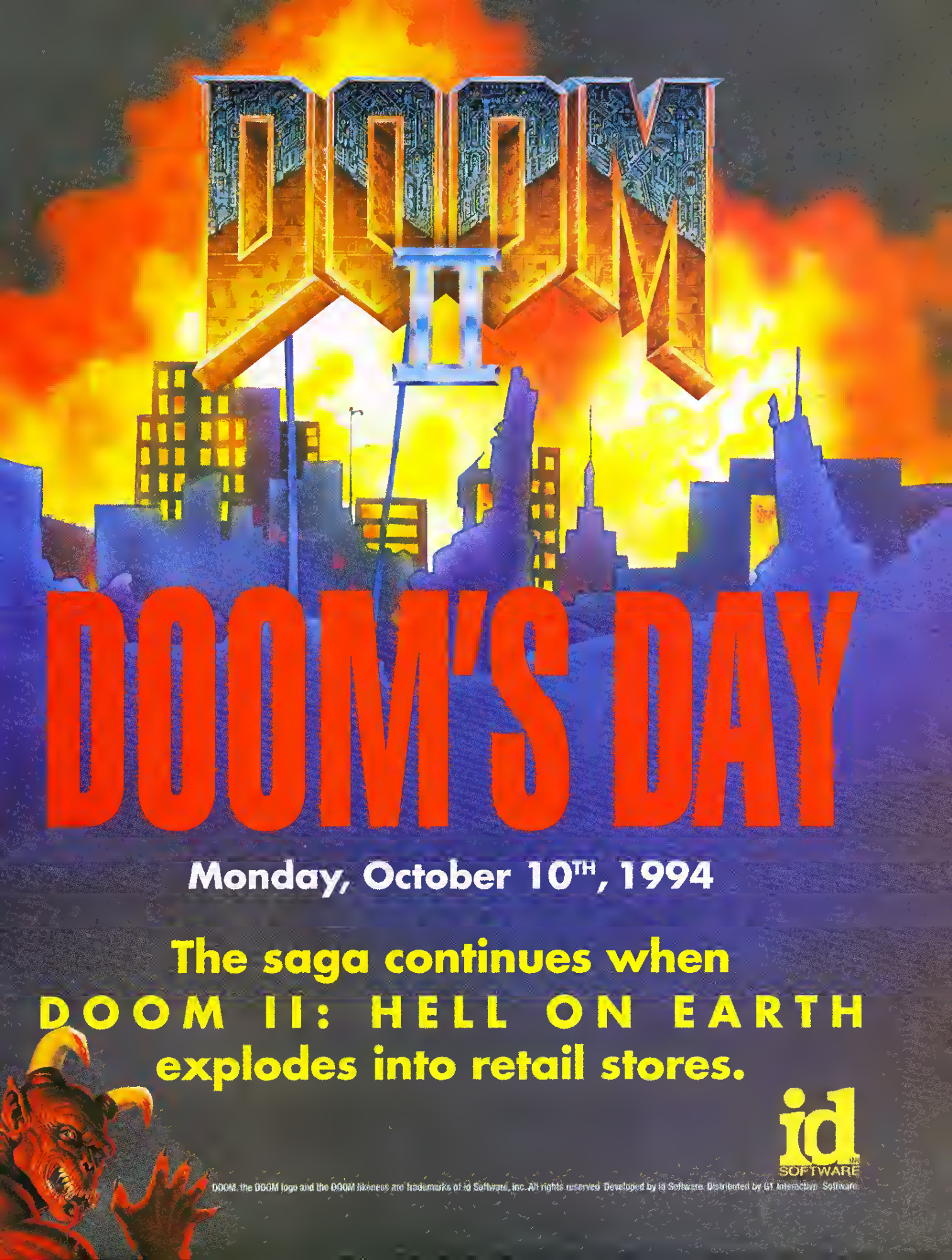
Zimmerer sees games as an entrance to the 'information superhighway.' "I see video games as the rudimentary beginning of getting children to understand computers. One of the keys to attracting girls to gaming will be the use of strong female characters. Girls would love to see a female Mario or Sonic."

Michealene Cristini Risley

Formerly the senior vice president of production and development at Marvel Productions, a sister company to Marvel Comics, Michealene Cristini Risley asked to help Sega form a task force for attracting female players before agreeing to work for the company. "By not getting involved with computers at a young age, girls are curtailing their future career opportunities," she explains. "When it comes to learning to use computers, video games are the path of least resistance."



According to Risley, girls would be more attracted to video games if more attention was paid to their interests. "Boys are more interested in external stimulation. Girls are more interested in internal challenges. They are collaborative and less competitive."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WOMEN IN GAMING

WE KNOW WHAT GIRLS WANT

EG Surveys the Female Gamers

by Arnie Katz & John Hardin

Everybody talks about the relationship between women and interactive electronic entertainment. Everyone has theories about why they don't play, what they would like, and how to get them to pick up a controller.

And exactly like discussions about the weather, there's always a lot more talk than action. There's little more in interactive electronic entertainment now than a decade ago to grab and hold the attention of women.

Everyone has a theory, but facts are scarce. Too many commentators are armed only with "common knowledge," the things that everyone knows are true but which no one has validated or proved. Small wonder that woman have increased their visibility in the hobby so little in the last decade! It's impossible to develop viable strategies when even the basics of the situation are only dimly understood by the people in position to bring about change.

Electronic Games decided to put an end to all the wandering, pointless speculation and get the facts. We surveyed the magazine's female readers for several months to create a profile of today's gaming woman.

The Demographics

More than half of those who responded to our surveys are adults. While a full one-third of the sample consists of junior and senior high school students (ages 12-16), this is more than balanced by the 34 percent who admit they're over 30. This is completely in sync with the male gamers surveyed during the same period, who averaged 24 years old with the same broad range of results.

One discrepancy is that only 8 percent are under 12. Clearly, pre-teen girls don't take to gaming as avidly as their male counterparts. So though the age curve is similar for those who *do* have that early exposure, the totals for women are lower across the board. So many never get involved during the period when they are most likely to acquire lifelong interests and hobbies for themselves.

The other demographic indicators have revealed little or no gender differentiation. Women gamers are mostly educated and affluent, just like the men.

The Gaming Environment

The myth that women only play RPGs and adventures on computers is just that, a myth. Take a look at the chart that accompanies this article to see the percentages of ownership for all major platforms. They divide gaming time among a variety of video, portable, computer, and multimedia entertainment systems. (Our study unearthed little female interest in coin-ops, but that may be a reflection of distaste for the male teen-dominated arcade environment, not the games themselves.)

"Everyone has a theory about women and gaming, but facts are scarce!"

The hobby's hardcore is the megagamers, those who pursue all forms of interactive electronic entertainment. True, the percentage of megagamers is lower among woman than men, by a margin of 41 to 50 percent, but that still gives credence to the idea that women are only interested in gaming on home computers.

In fact, 91 percent of **EG**'s readers are video gamers, at least to some degree. Half the survey group said they are primarily into cartridges. Only 16 percent identify themselves as pure computerists, and 8 percent are devoted to multimedia to the exclusion of other types.

Another survey question shed more light on this controversial issue. Asked to rate each type of platform on a 1-10 (10 high) scale, women gave the highest score to video, not computer, games. They rated cartridges 8.0 and computer programs 7.1.

How Much They Buy

Women may like all kinds of games, but they spend more of their money on disks than carts. During the last 12 months, the typical female player bought more than 25 titles. No one can call them dilettantes!

A quarter of the purchases are video games, which works out to one every other month. That's the estimated level of purchase which most video game companies use to forecast sales. Once a woman takes up electronic gaming, they get into it just as deeply.

Computer entertainment software purchases average almost one disk a month, with nearly six additional multimedia games a year.

Women aren't wild about portables, even though 58 percent own a Game Boy and 42 percent have a Game Gear. They buy about two new cartridges in a 12-month period.

What They Play

The platform is far less important than the content of the software. Asked to rate their interest in various subjects, women showed a great enthusiasm for science fiction and mystery, and much less interest in sports and war.

Each respondent rated each of these topics on a 1-10 scale, with 10 high. Science fiction scored an impressive 8.08, beating out mysteries (7.91) by an eyelash. Sports managed only a 4.3 and military brought up the rear at 3.5.

These findings show that the image really *does* have some basis in reality. Sports and military themes just don't capture the fancy of women game enthusiasts.

The Bottom Line

That's our preliminary profile of the modern female game enthusiast. Although a lot more research needs to be done, this preliminary study has already uncovered some reality gaps.

Misguided common wisdom, however well-intentioned, must be replaced by real-world data. Only when the interactive entertainment industry fully understands the female audience will it start to meet their wants and expectations.

System Ownership by Women

Hardware	Own	Plan to Buy
SNES	58.3%	17%
Genesis	75%	8%
Neo•Geo	8%	0
Jaguar	8%	17%
Game Boy	58%	8%
Game Gear	42%	8%
Lynx	17%	N/A
CD-i	8%	0
3DO: -	17%	N/A
PC CD-ROM		25%
17%		
Macintosh	17%	N/A
MS-DOS:	50%	N/A

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WOMEN IN GAMING

THE GENDER PHALLACY

By Joyce Worley

But, despite the fact that under some circumstances women will play games, it is undeniable that video and computer games are overwhelmingly a male dominion. Somewhere between age 9 and 12, we seem to lose the ladies.

The King's Quest RPG series designed by Roberta Williams has attracted many women.

Women don't like electronic games. That's common knowledge. You've all heard the litany: girls don't like lots of details, girls don't like strategy; girls are not interested in competition or aggression.

Society seems to condition women toward activities involving human interaction and pulls them away from solitary pursuits. Our culture's inherent sexism historically discourages female interest in mathematics, machinery, science, or technology.

But, wait! Someone must have misunderstood the situation. This isn't right. Like many things 'everybody knows,' this seems less based on fact than presumption.

There's hardly a woman under 50 who didn't play *Candy Land*. There's probably no one who hasn't enjoyed rousing games of *Monopoly* and *Scrabble* with the family. Role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* attract many women, especially while in college. Obviously, despite the false presumptions, under some circumstances women do play games. And, not just group games. Women played **Pac-Man** in great numbers. They also played **Centipede**. There are a half-dozen or so other coin-op titles that had appreciable numbers of female players. And many women avidly play games on-line.

We think we know why. Now how do we change it?

It's probably a good idea to look at the games women don't usually enjoy, to determine how to win them back.

Although they like role-playing games, it is rare to find a female dungeonmaster. Not many women are willing to spend all the time necessary to learn the rules and create scenarios.

Although they like shooting games, women don't seem to like warfare and combat. As testimony to this fact, attend any wargamer's club or convention: you won't be able to find too many women there.

Although women may enjoy puttering for hours with a jigsaw puzzle, they don't like to spend hours on unsolvable problems. They enjoy meeting a goal, completing a task.

We all know that girls like games with pretty graphics. They don't like a bunch of x's and o's: they want representational art, and won't get too involved in play without something attractive on screen to look at.

Games that have a female protagonist on screen are more interesting to women than those with only heroic males. Offering a choice of on-screen personalities makes a game more attractive to women players.

Everyone agrees that women don't like to look foolish. They seldom enjoy any game that requires them to fail over and over in the learning process. The arcade games women liked were instant-learners. Anyone could make at least some headway with **Pac-Man**. Anyone could shoot at least some of the bugs on the screen in **Centipede**.

Tetris and **Shanghai** charmed women; **Mortal Kombat** did not. **King's Quest** drew them into Roberta Williams' magical fairy tale. **Victory At Sea** did not.

> "Tetris and Shanghai charmed women; Mortal Kombat did not. King's Quest drew them into Roberta Williams' magical fairy tale. Victory At Sea did not."

Anyone who takes the time to visit a grammar school knows girls enjoy playing with computers and other gadgetry as much as boys do. Feminine fear of technology is largely being erased in that age group. Girls are interested in educational software; they enjoy a good challenge, and they do well in skill games. They compete openly and freely with the boys in the classroom. When they get home, they may even play video games.

George Bernard Shaw explained the phenomena years ago. "Young women have better things to do with their time than to sit for hours practicing..." He was talking about pianos, but it still applies. Young women need rapid positive feedback, or their attention moves to something else. This is not because they can't fix their attention on something; it's because they have so many other interests, and if an entertainment doesn't grab them in the first few minutes of play, they'll find something more interesting to do.

Things will change. The generation growing up with technology today won't fear machinery tomorrow. Children that use computers in their studies will use them in the future, too.

As the Digital Highway reaches more people, more females will play games on line. By modem, they are comfortably distanced from embarrassing failures, and feel less threatened by on-lookers who might tease or criticize their performance on a game.

The games are changing, too. Female protagonists, finer graphics, better sounds, and music all make games more attractive. Entertainments that depend less on competition or combat, and more on player involvement increase the female user base.

Easier to use hardware will help women warm toward computers and video games. Right now, the hardware world is pretty unattractive. The DOS system is difficult to use. Although women use their office computers, they are usually working through some kind of industry-specific template that doesn't teach them the DOS system. Even if they do become comfortable with their computer in the office, they equate the machine with work. When they get home at the end of the day, that's the last thing they want to be reminded of. Even video games have little appeal to women who never quite got comfortable with equipment.

But new interfaces that make the computer more approachable to the user will help change that. Windows has taken the first step, and now even more sophisticated interfaces are becoming readily available that take the trial-and-error out of home computing. Blackbox systems have the same appealing ease of use. When all you have to do is just slip in a disk or cartridge, it's less daunting to a person who is afraid of making a mistake.

There's a lot of hope for the future, as all the new technologies make the hardware more approachable, and software is designed which is much more sensitive to the special interests of the female users.

We may never get back the teenaged girls, but hopefully we can arrange gaming so that we won't lose them in the first place.

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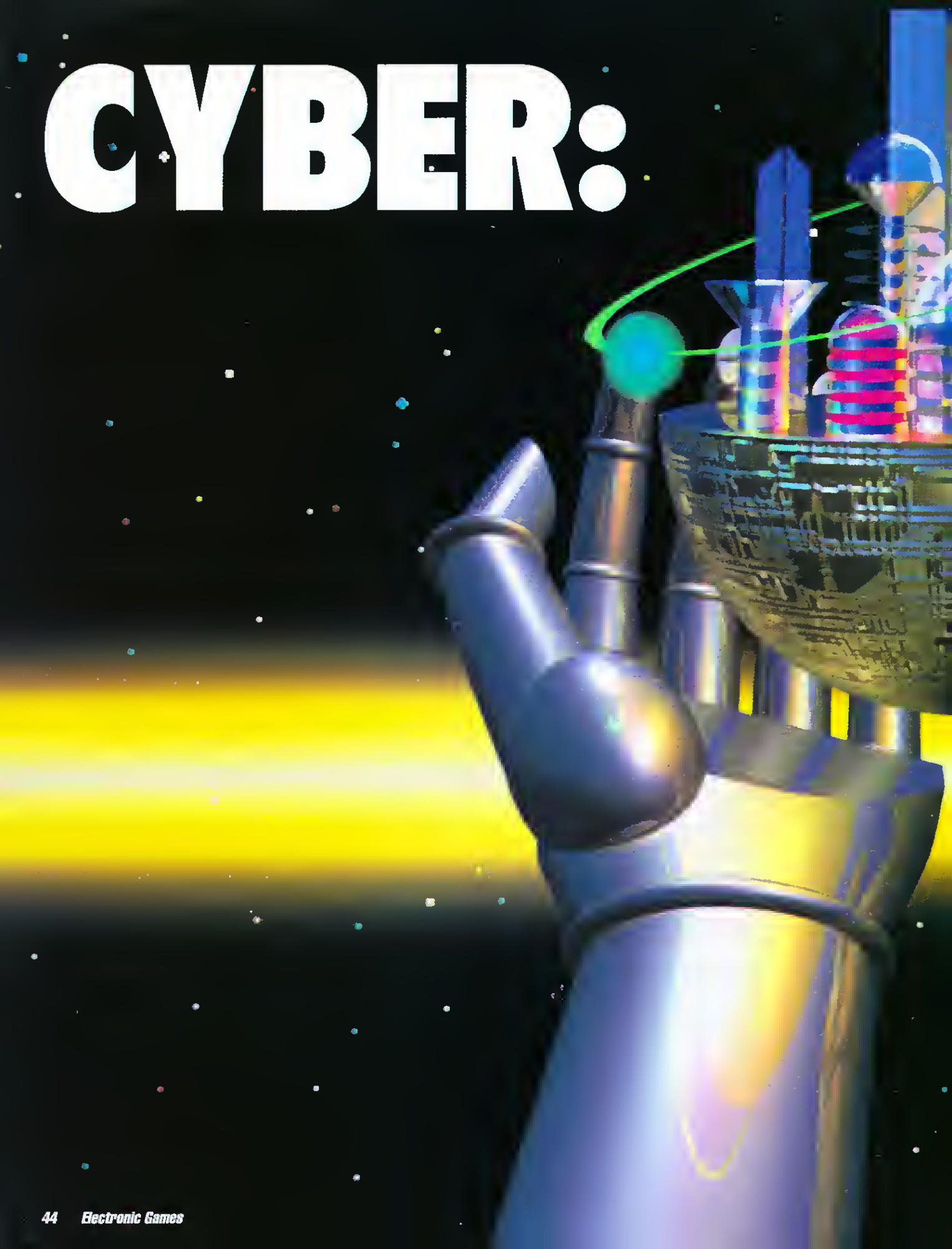
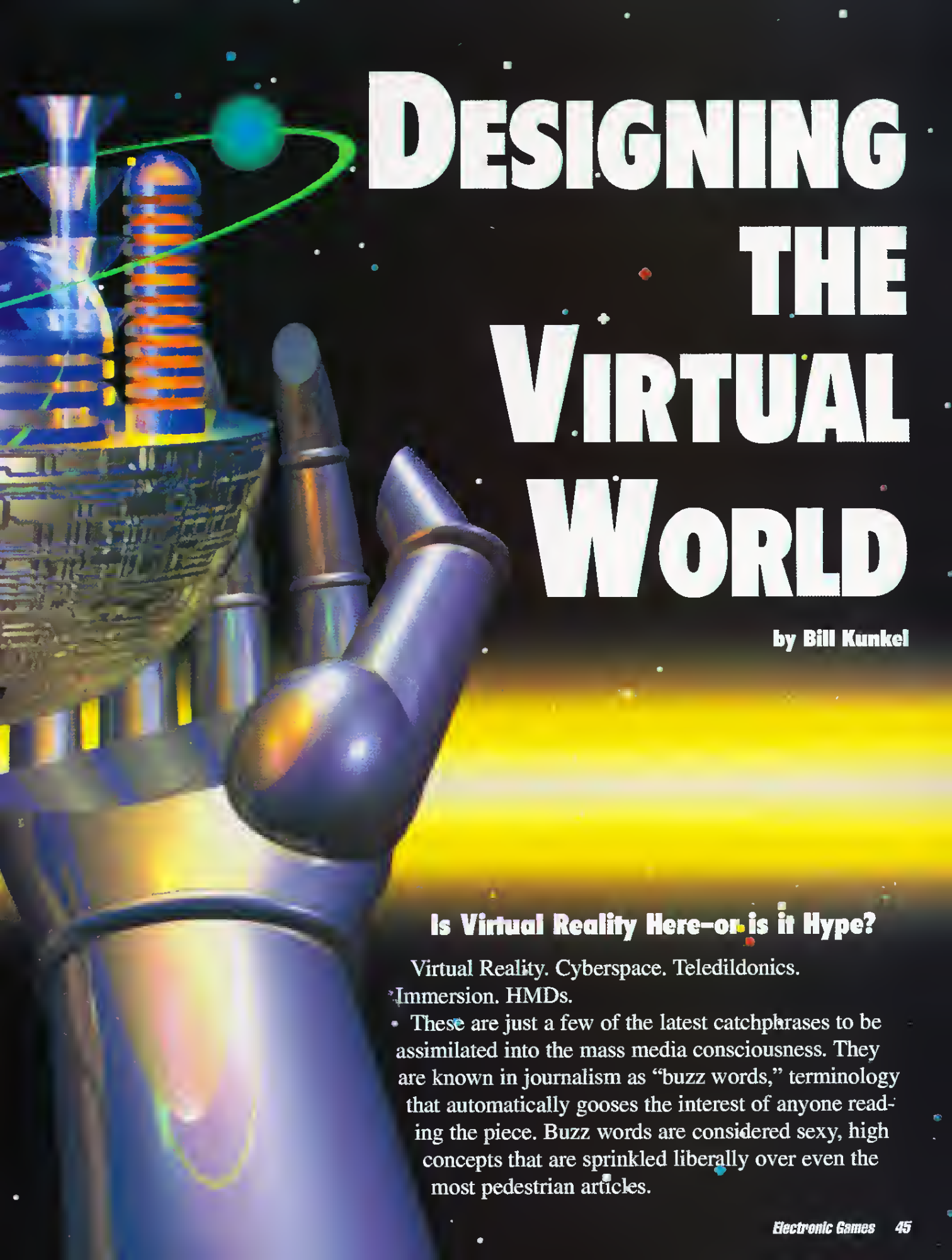




DESIGNING THE VIRTUAL WORLD

by Bill Kunkel

Is Virtual Reality Here—or is it Hype?

Virtual Reality. Cyberspace. Teledildonics. Immersion. HMDs.

These are just a few of the latest catchphrases to be assimilated into the mass media consciousness. They are known in journalism as "buzz words," terminology that automatically gooses the interest of anyone reading the piece. Buzz words are considered sexy, high concepts that are sprinkled liberally over even the most pedestrian articles.

What is VR?

Of course, the evolution of high-tech concepts into mainstream technobabble is nuthing new. A recent issue of *Entertainment Weekly* praised the Atari Jaguar cartridge **Tempest 2000** as an example of "multimedia" at its best. So it's only natural that the meaning behind the terminolngy degenerates in the course of its journey from the pages of technical journals to the cover of *Time Magazine*.

First, we have the question: what *is* virtual reality, or VR?

The term was first used by computer visionary Jaron Lanier over a decade ago to describe a process quite different from our current understanding of VR. Lanier set up a process in which a user sits in un empty studio space, watching a large monitor on which their video image appears.

But in the monitor—the virtual world—the set is fur from empty. There are drums, cymbals, and other pereussion instruments with which the user can interact. When the user taps the area where the drum appears, however, he hears a drum beat. Soon, through repetition, the user discovers that he or she can interact with all the virtual instruments.

This technology remains in use today; we can see it on shows like Nickelodeon's *Nick Arcade*, in which kids run around on a series of barren platforms, reacting to the obstacles and enemies wbich appear on several large monitors surrounding the room. The home viewer, in turn, sees the kids projected into a virtual game world in which they *become* Mario, Sonic, Bubsy, etc.

However, because of the extensive and expensive equipment involved in reproducing this type of VR on a mass market level, this category of virtuul experience on the whole has remained largely a novelty.

The emergence of relatively inexpensive Head Mounted Displays (HMDs) in the late '80s signaled a renewal of interest in the concept of VR. This cemented the public's notion of VR as being directly related to some form of helmet or binocular visor. Simultaneously, the Cyberpunk movement, as represented by books such as Wdliam Gibson's *Neuromancer*, gained literary prominence in the media. Suddenly, the computerist—formerly pereeived exclusively as a geek or nerd—was transformed into a romantic, almost outlaw-like character, "jacking in" to cyberspace, the conceptual name fur a computer-generated artificial reality.

Since then, the definition(s) of VR have grown like Tupsy, to the point where half the electronic games on the market today are claiming some level of VR experience. What used to be called simply "first-person perspective" games are now taking the position as full-blown VR.

A year or so ago, at a SIGGRAPH (a trade show for high-end users of computer graphics ad animation) workshop, an attempt was made to codify the various types of VR [see "VR Glossary"]. The result is the most all-inclusive definition yet of what comprises VR, including Mirror World, Waldo World, nnd Through the Window presentations.

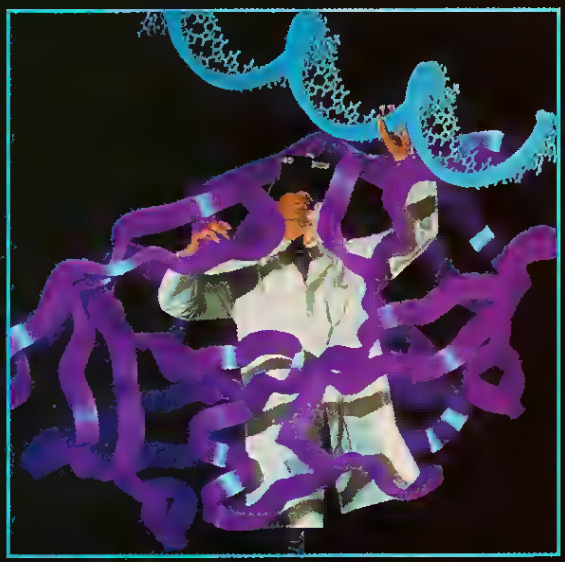
Real World Applications

In the real world, however, VR is starting to make significant inroads into several key areas, including real estate and medicine. These breakthroughs will eventually filter down to the entertainment market, but until then, VR is busy helping build a better tomorrow.

Last Mareh, Division Inc., a VR system producer, and Japan's Matsushita Electric Wurks (Panasonic in the U.S.) announced that they would combine to demo a VR walk-through of a sophisticated architectural environment. The user can explure a two-story Japanese house, with textured rooms and intereonnecting stairs, using an HMD and mouse.

Then in June, Apple unveiled new VR technology that allows users to take virtfal tours of buildings such as museums, historical locations, and even the Starship Enterprise. Dubbed QuickTime VR, the software basically assembles a visual database of a given location, with special features such as zoom-in for a eloser look.

Simon & Schuster Interactive, a division of Viacom, will be among the first to support the CD-based technology. **Star Trek: the Next Generation Interactive Tech Manual**, a QuickTime VR program which allows users to get in close to see the details of the Enterprise, is slated for release this fall.



The field of medicine is also on the verge of developing extremely important applications of VR technology for everything from surgery to pharmaceuticals. We've all seen news footage of surgeons performing VR exploratories, but an even more important contribution may lay in the field of molecular modeling for purposes of creating more effectively designed drugs.

Mulecular modeling allows the scientist to interact in a fully three-dimensional mode. Not only can the user observe a model of a particular molecule in three dimensions, they can also manipulate its pieces by simply reaching out, picking up a piece, and repositioning it.

Bringing VR Home

Several companies have been competing to bring the VR experience to the mass market. Nintendo and Hasbro are rumored to be developing some sort of non-HMD VR technology for the home market, and Sega collected a ton of ink on its vaunted Genesis VR headset.

But while the Nintendo/Hasbro project is still alive, nobody really believes the Sega system will ever make it to retail shelves as was first planued. Stories regarding the fate of the device, which made the cover of *Popular Science* last year, and was hyped extensively in the gaming press, deal with a variety of factors, from aesthetic to medical.

The VR device which Sega showed at CES over a year ago was busically a pair of Game Gear sereens mounted into a plastic headset. The peripheral, which was supposed to retail at under $200, was given universally poor marks for performance. Moreover, there were rumors that extensive testing revealed that the headset could produce medical problems, beyond the risk of epileptic seizures, which can be opticully-induced through flashing light (check out the warning which appears in virtually all video game documentation to this effect).

Recent press releases from Sega fail to make

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any mention of the VR peripheral, and the product is presumed dead.

A more serious player in the home VR sweepstakes is VictorMaxx Technologies, creator of the CyberMaxx, an immersive, HMD peripheral which is compatible with PC, Sega, Nintendo, and Jaguar systems. The 14-ounce headset allows users access to a 360-degree virtual environment with a 62-degree horizontal field of view, as well as stereo speakers and real-time tracking, so that the CyberMaxx is always synchronized to the many movements of the player's head during a game.

VictorMaxx has already signed deals with several software suppliers, including New World Computing, Domark, Interplay, Origin, and the Diaspar Virtual Reality Network. The peripheral itself will retail for a suggested price around $700, the cheapest entry point yet to mass market cyberspace.

The VR Arcade

The one place where everyone can "jack in" to the VR experience is the local arcade, where many coin-ops have jumped on the cyberspace bandwagon in a major way.

The major players, at the moment, are Virtuality and Visions of Reality (VOR). The Virtuality technology is about to experience a bump up in technology as those Amigas are replaced by powerful PCs. Also, Virtuality is about to go on-line with its **Star Trek: the Next Generation** software. Virtuality offers both a stand-up and sit-down version of the VR experience for added variety.

VOR, meanwhile, immerses the user in a futuristic-looking pod (Kaiser Electro-Optics' Vision Immersion Module or VIM) and fits them with an HMD. The initial software entry is a space dogfight contest, called **Cybergate**, which was developed for play at a VOR Family Entertainment Center (similar to the Virtuality and FASA BattleTech operations). The plot line involves a pair of dispossessed alien races, the aggressive Ptox and the hard working Shandari, who find themselves locked in mortal combat at the lip of a portal, the Cybergate, at the edge of their solar system.

Whither VR?

Obviously, virtual reality is a happening, "today" kind of concept which is beginning to thrive in our technology-hungry society. Within just the past few decades we have seen electronic technology make our lives easier, for better or worse. With time saving tools such as calculators to make things easier, on the flip side we sometimes scoff at the impersonality of the computer age.

With applications to provide superb entertainment while we wait. VR is yet another example of a concept that has found a very comfortable niche in the timeline.

And further, as a great wise man once observed, there is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come.

A VR Glossary

Virtual reality, as one of the premiere buzzwords of the '90s, has created quite a bit of confusion among users. What exactly is Immersion? What are the various types of VR?

In an attempt to throw some light on the subject, here is a glossary of terms which have been associated with the subject of VR.

AI—Abbreviation for Artificial Intelligence.

A-Life—Short for Artificial Life, characters who exist entirely in cyberspace.

Bandwidth—The transmission range of any cybersystem.

Cab Simulator Environments—Systems such as VOR and Virtuality in which the user is immersed inside a pod of some sort.

CAVE—A form of 3-D theater using huge wall screens to create a virtual world.

Cyber—Refers to any object or reality created by a computer.

Cyberspace—A computer-generated reality in which users can interact with one another and with computer created characters and objects.

Cyberpunk—A literary school centered around the works of William Gibson, especially *Neuromancer*. In these books, hackers in cyberspace "jack in" to the "net" through direct coupling with their central nervous system.

Electronic LSD—Relates to the euphoric state which is created by some VR experiences, as well as to the altered level of consciousness the user under goes when under the VR mask.

Fuzzy Logic—A form of AI logic which allows a result to be expressed as a probability, rather than an absolute linear certainty.

HMD—Short for Head-Mounted Display, the visor-like peripherals which users place over their eyes and ears in order to experience VR.

Immersion—The process in which external stimulae is kept to a minimum, thereby enhancing the reality of the VR experience. The user is said to be "immersed" in the VR world. Also Immersive First Person.

Input Devices—Control devices which input data to a computer, including HMDs, mouse, joysticks, drawing tablets, VR gloves, etc.

Jacking In—Refers to the experience of entering cyberspace. The VR equivalent of booting up.

Mirror World—A type of VR in which the user sees and manipulates an on-screen surrogate, as in the game **Alone in the Dark**.

Net—Short for Network or Internet. The area through which cyberspace is accessed.

Position Tracker—The technology whereby a user's movements are tracked by the computer. When the user turns his or her head right or left, the position tracker senses the movements and displays the appropriate visuals. Also: Motion Sensors.

Sensor Gloves—An input device which is worn over the user's hand.

Teledildonics—Virtual sex.

Through the Window—A form of VR in which the user experiences the virtual world on a screen through a first-person perspective, as in **Spear of Destiny** and **Doom**.

Virtual Audio—Three-dimensional sound, as in QSound.

Virtual Reality—Come on, read the article.

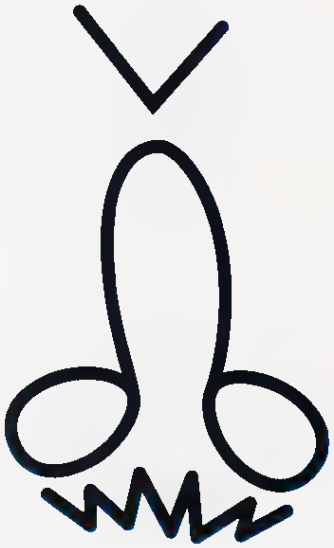
Waldo World—A form of VR in which the user manipulates on-screen objects through computer-generated mechanical arms.

Of course, this list barely scratches the surface of virtual reality and its many associated wonders. And, as time goes on, more and more such terminology will be integrated into our everyday language. As a result, we'll be updating this roster as time goes on.

Stay virtual!

After.

This Fall five very exciting new games will cheer you up considerably Quarantine, Hell, Frontier-1st Encounters, Bureau 13, and Star Crusader



Before.

The New Face of Interfaces

Chicago: a name to conjure with. This long-awaited operating system from Microsoft has the potential to be one of the greatest boons to the gaming public since the introduction of the 386, or to be a boondoggle on the level of MicroCbannel architecture.

Chicago is the new OS (operating system) from Microsoft that should be on the streets by the end of this year, and in a nutshell, it is Windows and DOS pressed into one product. Chicago, if Microsoft is to be believed, is to be the end of DOS as a stand-alone product.

Most gamers will greet this news with screams of frustration. They have tried to play games in Windows. The Graphical User Interface bogs down under the intensive video processing requirements of gaming. There are a couple of reasons for this.

First is that Windows isn't, despite some people's misunderstanding and disinformation from some software concerns, an operating system. It is what hackers would call a bag on the side of DOS. That is, it is something that is tacked on to MS-DOS, and not a stand-alone operating system. Thus, it is slow.

Secondly, the video modes Windows uses aren't the fastest in the world, though they provide good resolution. So not only does Windows inherently slow down a computer, but it also forces games to use a fairly slow video mode on top of it. The result is one all gamers are familiar with: the feeling of being a flea riding a camel while being passed by the sports cars of DOS users.

Well, the good news about Chicago is that these speed problems shouldn't be there. The primary reason is that Chicago is a true OS. It doesn't require anything else to run. Chicago does all of its talking to the processor by itself.

As a matter of a fact, working with DOS through Chicago will be an emulation: MS-DOS will be a bag on the side of Chicago.

The other big factor of gaming in Chicago is that Microsoft appears, finally, to have learned its lesson. Gaming is one of the biggest drivers of the PC right now, and instead of treating gamers like stepchildren, Chicago promises some goodies that seem to be custom tailored for the entertainment prone.

Probably the most important new feature for gamers in Chicago is inherent support for network and modem multi-player games. There is even going to be an option to switch from voice to modem and back during a phone call. With games like **Doom** proving there is an insatiable appetite for real head-to-head competition among the gaming community, this feature alone should be enough to force game enthusiasts to buy one of those little dental suction pipes to keep the drool off their keyboards.

A host of video and sound goodies are also going to be riding the Chicago wave, including a built-in 3-D rendering package, digital video support for hardware and software-based decompression, video-sound synchronization, and lots of other bonuses.

But other than the direct prizes, many other features of the OS are going to be major coincidental boons to gamers. One is plug-and-play technology. For years, Apple users have enjoyed a big advantage over their PC hacking brethren; when they get a peripheral they simply plug it into the slot and it works. The words IRQ, DMA, and jumper mean nothing to an Apple user. With Chicago, the PC platform is finally going to have this benefit. When a new card comes in, the PC user will simply insert the unit in its slot, install the software, and all the nasty hardware bits will sort themselves out between the cards: the way it should have been years ago. And the new system will make those nasty hand patches of the AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS files a thing of the

past. The sounds of cheering are deafening.

And what is this gamer's utopia going to look like? At this time, it is too early to tell what the final end interface of Chicago is going to look like, but it is a safe bet that it is going to out window Windows by a long shot.

Further, some object orientation, being able to just drag an application to another application and have the two of them work in concert, is sure to be on the slate.

With all of these nifty new geegaws, where is the potential boondoggle? Well, there are a few. The first, and smallest, problem is the overwhelming rush of bug reports rumored to be pouring into Microsoft from the beta testers. Bullet-proof this beta isn't.

Bottom line? There are probably going to be shipping delays on the final code. However, this is minor because shipping delays are so endemic to Microsoft as to be almost a hallmark. Anyone with any sense simply adds about 50 percent to any promised times from Microsoft.

The bigger problem is that there has been a great deal of product position juggling at Microsoft; Windows NT, Chicago, Windows For Workgroups, Daytona. One for this kind of user, one for that kind of user, one to replace these two, one to replace these others ... one OS to rule them all, one OS to find them, one OS to bring them all and at Microsoft bind them. Bottom line is that it would take an oracle to be sure which of the OSs are going to get the real support when all is said and done.

And just to make this perfectly clear situation a bit more complicated there is another city name: Cairo. Depending on who you listen to at any given time, it is going to be the final burning bush of computer OSs, or 8.8 Richter scale vaporware.

Cairo promises to make computing a truly intuitive activity. Let's say a user has an icon for a modem program. They also have an icon for a game. Want to play the game over the modem? Just drag the modem icon over to the game and it will automatically add modem features to the game. Sound too good to be true? Well, it probably is, but the technofetishists say it is doable, at least in theory. Microsoft says it is going to be out last quarter of '95. Add the 50 percent rule and see it in 1996 or so, assuming it isn't renamed for another city, or they might change to animals if they run out of cities.

The bottom line on all of this is simple: early adopting might not be the brightest idea in the world when it comes to a new OS. A lot of things are being promised with the next generation of operating systems, but with so many factors up in the air, early adoption is asking for an early burn for sure.

Of course, all of this is in the short term. The long term promises for OS and interface development are the carrot, just as a current proliferation of competing standards and questionable product lines are the stick.

"You know, I once saw this program for a Commodore quite a few years ago when I was in England called, I think, **Little Man**. What it did was put this little man in your monitor," says Ron Copley, a consultant specializing in small systems technology.

"He had a little house and you could press buttons to stock his larder and give him new things for his house. Well, this friend of mine, Gary, loved this program and used to sit watching it for hours.

"One day he leaves it on and goes out to the pub. He had a few too many and lost track of time. When he got back, the little man was starving to death, feebly knocking on the glass of the monitor to try to get some food. It traumatized poor Gary. He sat there for hours feeding the little man. It did no good to tell him this was just a computer simulation; he felt responsible for almost killing a bunch of bits."

Copley says this story illustrates the direction operating systems should go in the future.

"If an OS can build this kind of feeling in a user, then you really have something. The technology is there. That ad for AT&T where they show the computer talking about getting tickets for the play; that sort of thing is possible today," he says.

One program that is an attempt to move in this direction is **Crystal Windows**, by Domain. This program claims to create artificial worlds in the background of Windows. In fact, it makes minimally animated scenes that replace the desktop and wallpaper of the standard windows display.

"**Crystal Windows** is a screen saver with pretensions. But what they claim to do is going to be the future. Instead of seeing the desktop the way we do now, we are going to look at a real office and click on the functions we want. This is the way to get people involved in computing," Copley finished.

So while waiting for the technical bugs to get ironed out of today's systems and the dust to settle in the standards fight, gamers and the computing world in general have the carrot of truly friendly operating systems waiting around the corner. Just remember, some corners are further than others. *(Ed Dille)*

Mosa
Making the Inte

The cybernaut winds down unrelenting dark passages, attempting to decipher alien hieroglyphics at every turn. Fear, trepidation, and angst cloud the air. Anything is possible in this environment, good or bad. Such has been the way of the world for Internet Surfers from day one. Only the strongest players survive a straight jack into the digital backbone of cyberspace.

Some futurists, like George Alec Effinger, might relish this weeding out process, but far more of them heed the increasingly vocal plea to make the Internet a kinder, gentler place to visit for all who try. Thus far, the primary method of doing so has been Mosaic.

To the uninitiated, the features offered by Mosaic may not seem as noteworthy as they really are. Like many of the best stories, one almost had to be there to appreciate the full impact of what unfolded. If you're inexperienced at Net surfing, the only leap of faith necessary is that, unaided by programs like Mosaic, it is akin to walking naked at midnight through the worst part of town with $1000.00 bills taped all over your body.

Mosaic allows any user with average skills to run with the big dogs instead of sitting on the porch. How does it accomplish this feat? By providing a graphic user interface (GUI) very similar to Windows and a special hyper-text mark up language (HTML) that allows virtually any file on the World Wide Web to be read on a Mosaic page (or template).

What is the World Wide Web? Well, it may be a lot of things, but the most important thing for users to understand is that it is not the entire Internet. Some of the major nodes or file servers on the Internet have recognized the multimedia potential of WWW and devoted part of their TCI/IP interface to it. Without getting bogged down in the specifics of TCI/IP, just understand that it is one of many transfer protocols for the transfer of information. Consequently, Mosaic taps into the WWW multimedia interface where it exists, but cannot tap into areas that have not adopted the equivalent protocol.

Basically, WWW is a client/server system. Servers on the WWW net actually manage the data and provide it to clients like Mosaic upon request. In this respect, Mosaic is really nothing more than an unexpectedly beautiful Gopher. It looks great, but it's really nothing more than a glorified rodent that will ferret out snippets of data on the topic the user specifies.

Two things set Mosaic apart from other gophers. First, instead of the linear menu system which is prevalent in the latter (i.e., one must work from top to bottom), Mosaic allows complete freedom to jump laterally in the information tree as well as up and down. Secondarily, the use of hyper-text mark up language makes a big difference. HTML links related information in many different files, or diverse locations within the same large file, seamlessly together for easy compilation and retrieval. It is even capable of generating a Table of Contents on larger documents and allowing the user to browse that table in point and click fashion.

HTML documents are really only ASCII text files which have been coded with special markings to establish the linkages. Because users never have to get down to this level of detail, the mechanics of the process are largely transparent. That transparency, or

magic if you will, seems to be the root of the high degree of interest in Mosaic.

Available for Macintosh, Windows, and X Window workstations, Mosaic is capable of displaying complex graphics, video movies, and soundtracks as well as the basic information. Naturally, not all topics of interest will have accompanying graphic or sound files, but Mosaic can handle them if they are available. Additionally, as a catch-all tool for expanded access, Mosaic can be used to reach other Gophers, WAIS, FTP, and a plethora of general navigating tools,

new home of one of the key members of the original design team, Chris Wilson. "Chris Wilson and SPRY are a perfect fit," said David Pool, president of SPRY. "Both parties are committed to making the Internet easier for users to access. By combining the wealth of Chris' Mosaic knowledge, we are one step closer to making the Information Highway more than just a catch phrase."

"I am impressed with SPRY's drive to make the Internet readily accessible to consumers," said Wilson. "This relationship is very exciting and I look forward to participating in SPRY's successes with both the AIR Series

ic: net Friendly

and Internet in A Box."

SPRY is committed to changing the way everyone looks at the Internet. Although all the current hype and high profile reporting seems to focus on the social aspects of the Internet, SPRY correctly realizes that business participation and appropriate levels of service will be the catalyst that actually drives everyone up the onramp to the expressway. They feel that complete drop and drag integration with Windows is the ticket to new and uncharted horizons for users.

If users can already tap into local servers to print their files and accomplish all their research, why can't they accomplish the same functions with satellite offices in London or anywhere in the world? The vision is limitless, but the current technology cannot embrace all that should be in one fell swoop. *(Ed Dille)*

all of them less friendly than Mosaic, but remain accessible nonetheless.

The Mosaic screen is composed of two primary parts: a viewer window and a set of control icons. Everything starts on what is known as a home page. Portions of this page (and all subsequent pages) are highlighted to graphically show the presence of hyperlink codes to other areas. Clicking on a highlighted area sends you off to that page which, in turn, has its own links to other pages. Obviously, this type of access is much more free flowing and dynamic than traditional menu trees.

The current version of Mosaic was developed at the University of Illinois National Center of Supercomputing Applications (NCSA). An upgraded version of Mosaic is coming from SPRY, the

Paving the Country Road

Face it, no matter how experienced some users are, driving the ramps and interchanges that will someday be connected into the information superhighway is not fun. There are ruts and muddy country roads at every turn. While Mosaic and other GUI products mask these potholes from the casual user, it is still akin to covering the lion pit with a pretty tarp.

When dealing with the Internet, an important consideration to remember is that it is not a standard system. Unix boxes, DOS based systems, VAX\VMS systems, Windows interfaces, X-Windows interfaces, and a passel of other system architectures are all talking to each other through the TCP/IP protocol. But try as hard they might, the sugarcoat crowd is wrong. full internet access is not an easy task.

Many say that navigating the Internet can now be painless. With Gopher, Lynx, Mosaic, and such products, the pundits posit, there is no need for the Internet to be difficult. And this is true, if you want your Internet with training wheels.

The fact of the matter is, these menuing and presentation systems only act on data and systems that are formatted for them. These areas are only a fraction of the true net. For example, the area in which Gophers work is called by the educated Gopherspace. Gopherspace is not to confused with the whole Internet. While there are many useful data services available in this format, it is more like the Walt Disney version of the real, untamed badlands that make up the true untouched, full-bore net.

As time goes on, more and more goods and services are going to be provided in formats easy for the user to interface with, but at the moment, the World Wide Web (the Mosaic carrier area) and Gopher will only provide that information which is formatted for it, and not the full access many are led into thinking they have.

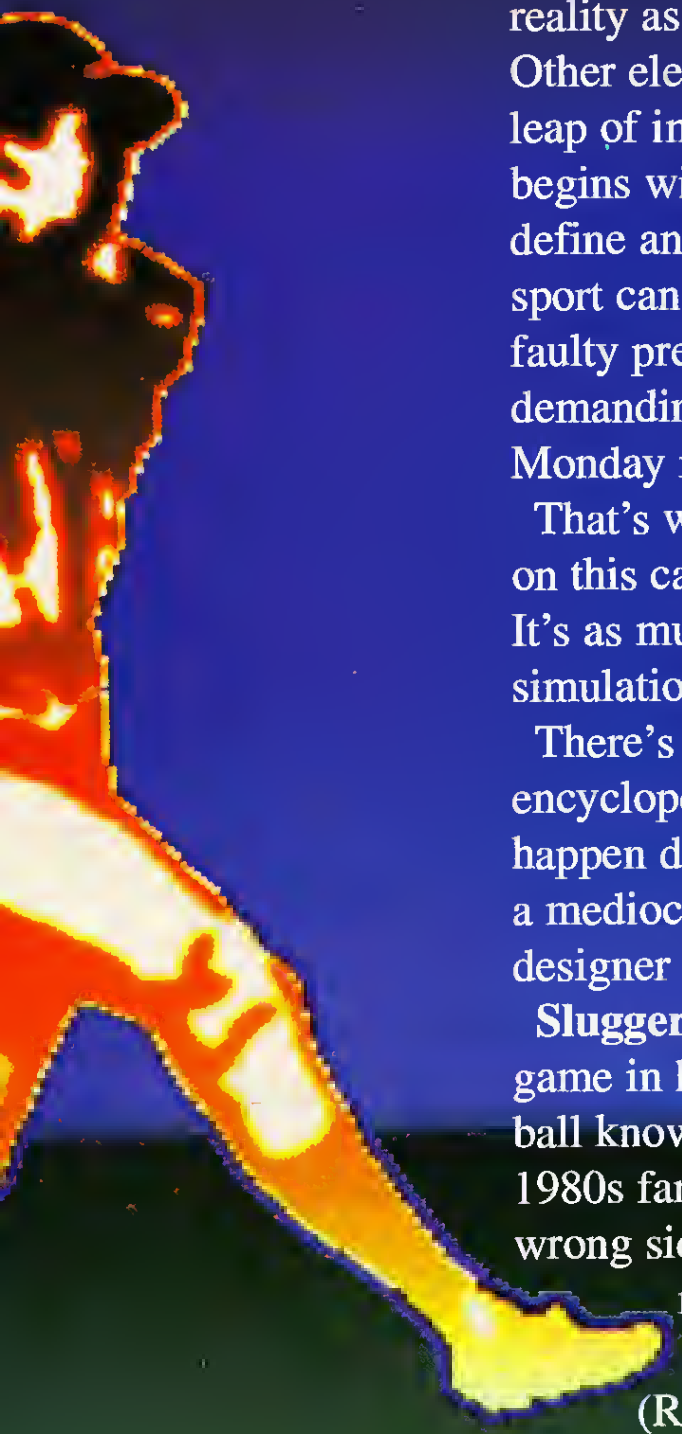
Until a vehicle for unimpeded access is developed, the full potential of the highway will not be realized. Each piece of the road may move up to seven lanes in both directions with less chance of collisions, but it will still be impossible to drive cross country with nothing but a full tank of gas, half a pack of cigarettes, and a good pair of Ray-bans.

(Ed Dille)

Cyberball:

Designing Sports Simulations

If you spec it, they will code



The sports simulation designer's job is to reflect reality as best they can, not create a new one. Other electronic games start with a license or a leap of imagination, but a sports simulation begins with knowledge. The author's ability to define and quantify the essential elements of a sport can prove decisive. A simulation based on faulty premises won't satisfy this large and demanding market of grandstand managers and Monday morning quarterbacks.

That's why most designers either concentrate on this category or stay away from it completely. It's as much a specialty as complex military simulations or digital chess.

There's no guarantee that a human baseball encyclopedia will design a good game. A lot can happen during the development process to "fix" a mediocre design or sabotage a good one. But a designer who doesn't know the sport is doomed.

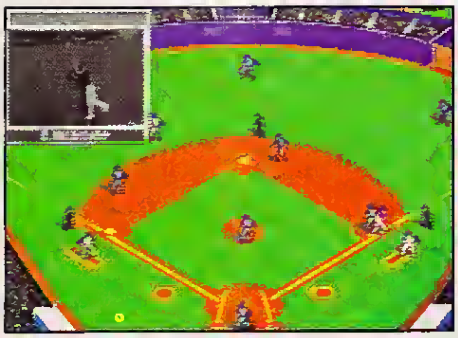
Slugger, possibly the worst computer baseball game in history, shows what happens when hardball know-nothings produce a game. This early-1980s farce mispositioned the shortstop on the wrong side of second base, used a ball with as much bounce as a lead weight, and scored fouls that then kick fair as hits. (Real baseball tried this rule for one season in the 1880s. Hugh Duffy hit .434 that year.)

Anatomy of a Simulation

A sports simulation is a mathematical model. For baseball, the program must reflect the previous-season performance of every individual ballplayer on the interactive screen. The perfect model would exactly duplicate the numerical results of the season on which it was based if every team is handled *exactly as it was during the actual season.*

The other major component is the logarithms which describe the on-field interactions. Each situation must be examined, analyzed, and broken down to its components.

Take a typical football play, the fullback off-tackle. More than running ability determines if the play goes for the fullback's rushing average, more yardage, or less. The team's blocking ability on the whole and offensive formation modify the runner's raw ability. What if the defense has great run-stoppers, anticipates the play, or keys on the runner?



Microleague Baseball 4 runs heavy statistical information using the PC's power capabilities.

How many factors are combined into each play-result is a crucial decision to be adapted to the game very early in the design process. Early computer titles had real player names and teams without much statistical support. Often, the same rating governed a stolen base attempt, a bunt, and stretching a hit.

Today's simulations, like **MicroLeague Baseball 4** (MLSA Interactive), **Front Page Sports Football Pro** (Dynamix), and **Tony LaRussa Baseball II** (SSI), take advantage of the computer's number-crunching talent to consider more factors than is practical for non-electronic simulations.

A few zealots devote themselves to literal season replays. Let's smile reassuringly at them and leave them undisturbed. Most people play these games to test their ability to manage, and general manage, a team more skillfully than the people who do it for a living.

Talk about performance pressure! A sports sim designer must write a game so convincing that, even though none of the players ends up with the real-season totals, the managers feel that their version of Barry Bonds has the same capabilities as the one who stars for the San Francisco Giants.

12 Steps to A Simulation Design

Of course, every simulation is a unique project. No two are designed and developed in exactly the same way, but this is generally the way they progress from conceptual idea to actual salable commercial product.

Step One

After signing the contract, and spending the advance money on riotous living (or maybe just the rent), the hard work begins. It's put up or shut up time for the designer, who must now actually do all the things the proposal's glowing generalities promised.

Step Two

The statistical model comes first, even though it may be modified many times during development. It's a structure of plain English logical instructions which the programmer eventually turns into program code.

Step Three

Brimming with confidence over creating a good mathematical model, the designer writes a preliminary design document. This is a moderately detailed overview, an expansion of the three-to-six page proposal. It's usually at least three times longer than the proposal and describes features like sound and graphics.

Step Four

A week or so after delivery of the preliminary spec comes the day of reckoning: the first serious meeting between the designer and the producer or project coordinator fine-tunes the preliminary document. Sometimes, the decisions made are so far reaching that a second, even longer, preliminary spec is produced. More routinely, the designer fills a notebook with the producer's suggestions and guidelines. The final specs will reflect this meeting.

Step Five

The designer produces rough sketches of game screens for the artists. Since game graphics take so long to produce, most producers want to get started on this phase of development as quickly as possible. These thumbnails don't look much like the slick finished work, but they give artists an idea of how the game-information should be presented to users.

Step Six

A fully detailed game-start sequence is now required. The designer fleshes out the brief description of the introductory, option, and selection screens in the preliminary document. This firms up team selection, user-adjustable game-parameters, modem play, and other options available to managers before the actual start of play. Many producers want a flow chart that shows how all the screens fit together within the game.

Step Seven

The designer writes a walk-through description of a typical game-interaction to finalize the routine of play. This tells programmers when and how to activate each statistical factor and formula.

The State of the Simulation Art

Competition is fierce in this category, and sports simulations are among the most frequently updated entertainment software products. Old sports sims don't fade away, they disappear into oblivion as new ones with sounder statistics, more fluid play, and flashier graphics take their place in the market.

In light of this situation, the EG editors don't want to create an artificial hierarchy. This year's sims are all better than last year's and probably not as good as next year's batch.

Recommendations are another story. Grandstand managers should definitely check out these cutting-edge titles: **Front Page Sports Football** (Dynamix), **Front Page Sports Baseball** (Dynamix), **MicroLeague Baseball 4** (MLSA), **NFL Football** (MicroSports), **Hardball '94** (Accolade), and **Tony LaRussa II** plus **Tony LaRussa CD** (both SSI).

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Step Eight

With play-mechanics now set, the designer completes an exhaustive description, augmented by thumbnail drawings, of the interface. This is valuable for artists and programmers already working on the game-start sequence and main graphics display. Having the actual interface integrated into the program early also makes it easier to test.

Step Nine

Extras like the stat compiler, schedule maker, weather and injury system are created while the implementation team is already working on the main part of the simulation.

Step Ten

The designer submits the final design specifications document, complete with the team rosters, stadium data, and suggestions regarding documentation.

Step Eleven

The poor producer wades through as many as 400 text-packed pages and renders his verdict on the final design specifications. In the best of all possible worlds, the producer makes a congratulatory phone call and authorizes a major milestone payment, suitable for more riotous living (or the rent). If not, it's revision time. Most contracts keep money dangling in front of the designer until the producer gets a 100 percent acceptable design spec.

Step Twelve

Some ideas play better on paper than in practice. During the development cycle, the producer returns with questions and problems. Most are solvable with a phone call, but others may necessitate additional writing. The designer may be consulted right up to the release of the finished simulation. *(Arnie Katz)*

I Never Played the Game

My father was a pretty fair soccer player in Europe before he came to the U.S. before World War II. America captivated the industrious immigrant, as it did so many newcomers. Disdaining a pro soccer career after the war, he took a job as a factory foreman and started rooting for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

After baseball, he took a fancy to college football. At first it was just the Army-Navy game, but shortly he was watching Southern Cal, Oklahoma, and Notre Dame. Soon after, he was also crazy about pro football and basketball. He was learning to love hockey when he died.

It disappointed him when his eldest son, me, showed no aptitude for sports. He had only to watch me peer myopically at the pitcher to know that I was not destined to replace Duke Snider. A growth spurt made me a decent schoolyard hoopster, but 6'3" guards who can't jump well, and run like they have one shoe nailed to the hardwood, don't generally go to the NBA.

Since I couldn't be a proficient player, I settled for becoming a knowledgeable fan. By the time I was 12, I thought I knew my stuff. Such is the confidence of youth.

Then I got my first set of APBA Baseball, a non-electronic sports simulation. I played it incessantly with friends, or solitaire when there wasn't anyone else around to provide opposition. I analyzed every aspect of APBA Baseball, trying to understand how it managed to simulate real-world performance so accurately.

Gradually, I became less of a rooter and more of a fan. I still bled Dodger Blue, but I learned to appreciate the sport whichever teams were on the diamond. When I helped start a six-manager draft baseball league in 1971, it forced me to monitor all the teams to keep up with the collection of all-stars I called the St. Louis Aliens.

It proved a short step from analyzing baseball and playing simulations, to conceptualizing my own sports game design. With fellow zealot Bill Kunkel, I finally got to put some of those ideas into practice in MicroLeague Baseball II (MLSA). Five years after we did that game, Bill and I are authoring a "next level" baseball sim with the working title MicroLeague Baseball. *(Arnie Katz)*

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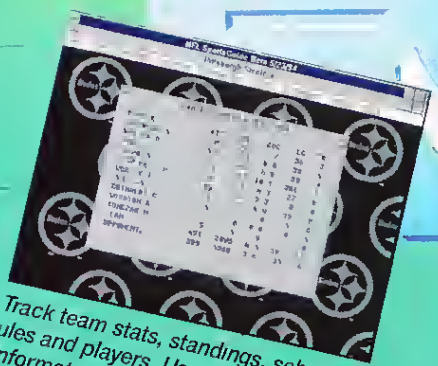

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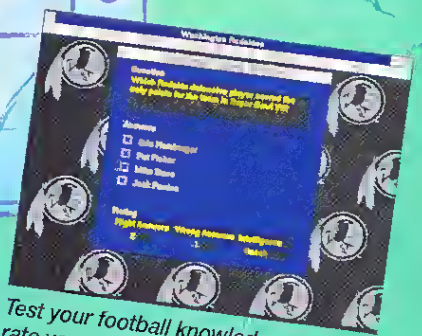

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Harvester's Graphics

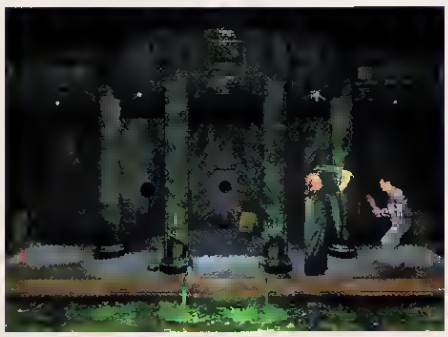
A CLOSER LOOK

Much of the power of **Harvester**'s effect on players comes from the detailed and sometimes grotesque graphics. Game designer Gilbert Austin worked closely with Future Vision's Kevin Obregon (creative director for **Harvester**) to visualize the horrific aspects of his plot. Mike Napodano and Chad Woyewodzic complete the graphics talent pool for **Harvester**, as 3-D artists/animators.

Woyewodzic took on the bulk of the game's modeling, but all three team members spent many hours combining 2-D graphics, 3-D models, and live video to bring the story of the small town of **Harvester** to the small screen. Obregon took some time away from the graphics design to speak to *Electronic Games* about this groundbreaking horror title.

Harvester began its production cycle as a complete set of storyboards for every major game scene. Austin spent a lot of time in school for film study and scriptwriting, so his talents fit a CD-ROM game like **Harvester** quite well. Obregon commented that "Gilbert writes from a visual standpoint primarily, which is by my estimation unusual for this industry. His unorthodox method and greatly descriptive text work well for me."

Initially, **Harvester** was going to be a low-res game instead of the hi-res work of art it has become. As the development of the game proceeded, Obregon and Austin realized that in order to achieve the effects necessary to frighten, sicken, or surprise a player they needed to produce the graphics in high resolution. "We share the same appreciation for the psychological aspects of horror and why a film or scene disturbs or horrifies them," Obregon remarked. The design team realized that detailed graphics and tremendous effort would be necessary to do the plot justice in the visual department. It was also quite difficult to perform the amount of movement necessary in the game with fewer pixels. The game's combat scenes are a key example.



The player has a chance to use more than 15 types of instruments-of-defense in the game.

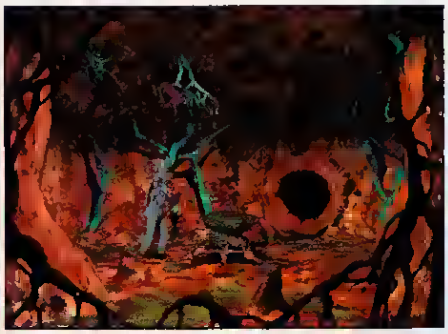
Harvester is a small town in the '50s that contains every cliché of the time period. Obregon explained how the setting was ideal for him to "cleanse the psychological palette by presenting the players with a bucolic small town that does not initially disturb or affect them. This era is perfect for juxtaposing really graphic horror with the sweet innocence of the time. The more we studied about the era, the less we realized we had to make up."

The game's artists used an Amiga 4000 with the Light Wave software program and an IBM PC with 3-D Studio to draw the game's graphics. Over 95 percent of the game's scenes are rendered 3-D images, with the exception of some special effects and unique objects. This percentage is so high because, in addition to the modeled objects in the game, the artists would take 2-D images and "wrap" them around 3-D objects like walls or paintings for a fuller, more realistic effect. The final touch to complete the scenes is one many artists overlook—the addition of imperfections and tiny details to ensure that the graphics don't look too "clean."

Harvester contains a large number of video clips as well as rendered scenes. Over 30,000 frames of film are part of the story. More than 60 characters play a role in the plot behind the suburb and its dark Lodge. Local talent provided the cast, although the game's design team make cameos as well. A typical video clip might involve as many as four separate elements brought together: a shot of a character convulsing, a weapon going through his body, the background, and filmed blood or bone showing through the wound. The artists aimed for realism. Obregon joked that "we would get into specifics about the blood and gore aspects of the game, and I don't think Gilbert realized how sick I was."

The team filmed separate sequences for each of the 18 weapons in the game so that there would not be a generic look to the combat segments. Also, they shot individual vowel and consonant mouth positions for each of the characters to build a library from which each line of dialogue could be assembled.

Although many players may decide **Harvester** is too violent, Obregon pointed out that almost all of the violence in the game is a result of a player's decision. There are alternate paths through most of the game's puzzles that involve no blood or guts, but most players will still want to see the more horrific aspects of the game. The designers attempted to capture the weirdness of the town in the game play and the graphics. An appropriate comparison is director David Lynch and his beloved *Twin Peaks*. "We are both 'students' of David Lynch's films. Without copying Lynch directly, we wanted to take an approach like Lynch, but in a unique **Harvester** way."



Could this be an inside view into the minds of the artists and designers at Future Vision?

Their efforts paid off: nothing else available looks or plays like **Harvester**. *(Russ Ceccola)*

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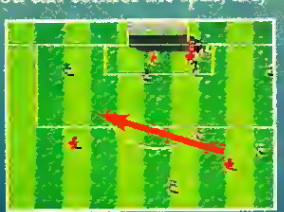

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Phantasmagoria in the Studio

Sierra On-Line's New Studio

Phantasmagoria will garner much praise this fall as an adventure game with twisted overtones, but many will overlook the effort that went into the video that is so integral to the product.

Unlike many games that present video clips to players as dramatic interludes, every scene of **Phantasmagoria** involves some sort of video mixed with computer-generated graphics. A trip to Sierra On-Line's new high-tech studio in the center of Oakhurst, CA, near the Sierra offices, revealed the hard work and 12-hour days put in by the production team.

When Roberta Williams, designer of **Phantasmagoria**, envisioned her first horror product, she felt that it had to involve real people, instead of computer graphics, because of the nature of terror and the necessary connection of the player to a cast of characters.

Sierra already had a small studio in a warehouse, but needed to develop a more modern facility for the game. Bill Crow, technical director for the game and director of technology for Sierra, worked with technicians and designers to build the studio. Although Crow, the game's video director Peter Maris, cinematographer Jerry Wolfe, and the staff used the studio exclusively for **Phantasmagoria** until the end of June, Sierra plans to rent the facility to other film crews and use it for future games.

The studio has a modern design to suit almost any filming need. There are three dressing rooms with lighted mirrors for the talent. Lounge areas are provided as well.

On the technological side, the studio's control room contains over $60,000 of equipment, which includes an UltiMatte imaging system, three computers, and various monitors and sound devices.

The set itself is a three-walled cove with rounded corners painted blue. When someone walks toward a corner of the room, they lose all sense of depth perception. A lighting grid of "Cyc-lorama" lights keeps the same shade of blue consistent on all areas of the set.

Although the entire production of **Phantasmagoria** will have taken about a year-and-a-half by the time of its release, only two months of that time (May and June) were spent on filming the game's scenes and over 500 camera angles. By *Electronic Games*'s visit in mid-May, the crew had already filled 19 half-hour Beta SP cassettes of professional broadcast video quality. This amounts to almost 10 hours of 15-second clips in three weeks of filming.

The UltiMatte system is the heart of the game's special effects. Crow said that "every shot is a special effect because the entire world is a virtual 3-D world." The UltiMatte system, unlike a ChromaKey system, eliminates all blue edges from video elements.

In order to integrate the video and Silicon Graphics workstation-drawn backgrounds, Maris first films the actors in a practice take. This shot is viewed against a black screen in the control room in order to "get a more accurate palette without any blues in it," according to Crow.

For the real take, they keep the blues of the set in the shot and must match the camera angle to the background's angle. Afterward, they merge the real take with the background using the palette from the practice take to establish the video element's true colors and hues. The three control room computers help this process. One PC acts as a controller for the UltiMatte system. The second contains the graphics and backgrounds. The third performs various functions, including painting out parts of the video and transferring the scenes one frame at a time to videotape.

On the day of the visit, actress Victoria Morsel (who plays Adrienne Delaney, the star of the game) filmed a scene in which she looks down at an object and says the line "What is this?" It took 1½ hours to film this scene which lasts all of three seconds! Morsell and the other talent stayed in rental cabins in nearby Bass Lake during filming. She remarked that "it takes some getting used to" to imagine all of the scenery.

Actress Victoria Morsell on the set trying to get the right angle for a scene.

The tough part for the game's designers comes after the filming when they have to blend the video and game play. "It's a challenge for us to blend where Victoria goes from a dramatic scene to a natural state where the player can move her," Crow commented. But that's exactly what will happen in the end.

When you play **Phantasmagoria**, think of all the work that went into the production of each movement. The actors and crew will remember them vividly! *(Russ Ceccola)*

Sierra's studio manager and Phantasmagoria technical director Bill Crow.

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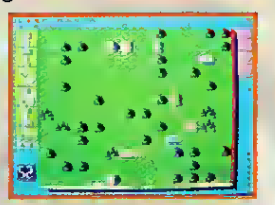

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Days of Our Lives Goes Interactive

Since the 1970s, researchers have actively pursued the dream of interactive television. The visionaries' initial struggle, complete with crude programming and expensive technology, has yielded to the interactive television reality.

The Interactive Network (IN) is the first and only subscription-based, patented, interactive home television entertainment system that allows viewers to play along in real time with television programs using a wireless, handheld, portable control unit.

IN's simulcast programming comprises virtually every televised professional and college sport, including the Olympics. Other prime time fare includes *Murder, She Wrote*, *Law & Order*, *American Gladiators*, a variety of game shows (*Wheel of Fortune*, *Jeopardy!*), and much more.

Sofa spuds can also connect with news and talk shows (*20/20*, *60 Minutes*, and *NBC Nightly News*) as well as educational PBS programming, including the popular *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?*

Other than *The Ricki Lake Show*, what more could a TV viewer need?

How about soap operas!

Like sand through the hourglass...

NBC's number one soap is hitting the interactive airwaves in September, 1994. *Days of Our Lives*, a peacock network staple since 1983, will allow IN subscribers to become even more involved in the complicated lives of their favorite stars.

Fans will be able to register opinions on everything, from the general (who will sleep with whom, and when), to the burning issues generated from restored memories. Additionally, newcomers to Salem can access information about past episodes, review character profiles and plot twists, and view material on *DOOL* fan clubs.

This will not be a "twist-a-plot" scenario, however. While input results would be transmitted to IN and stored for later credit, this is more of an electronic way to do what soap watchers have always done: communicate about the "lives" of other people. In other words, gossiping without having a direct impact on *DOOL*.

Control is all you need...

To join in the fun, users need only the hardware and the subscription service. Currently, the hardware is the easiest element to obtain.

The Interactive Control Unit (ICU) is a lightweight, durable plastic case, roughly 12" long x 5.5" wide x 2" high. The ICU has a backlit, LCD display screen that is eight lines by 40 characters and is capable of displaying bit-mapped graphics. In addition to the retractable QWERTY keyboard, there are eight selection keys and dedicated help, undo, exit, and info keys.

The ICU is wireless, and does not plug into a television. It processes information from an FM radio signal, via a built-in 9600 baud FM SCA data receiver. The power supply includes both a rechargeable eight hour battery and an AC adapter. The built-in memory back-up is supplied by a seven-year lithium battery. The unit, which should retail for approximately $199, is available at selected major department and electronic stores.

Regrettably the service is currently only available in the San Francisco Bay Area, the Sacramento Valley, and Chicago. However, IN plans to be in the top U.S. markets by the end of 1994. When that happens, consumers can expect to pay a monthly fee of $15 and then a competition per-play fee of $.50-$2.00, or an all-inclusive fee of $25.00 per month.

Tune in ... and play

The ICU receives its data stream simulcast with the television signal via an unused portion of the FM radio band. At company headquarters, producers send information to subscribers' homes which is simulcast with local television signals, allowing the users to play in "real-time." At home, the user reads the information via the display screen.

So now that someone has this unit, how does it work? If the subscriber opted for a Detroit Tigers-California Angels game, they could call up player bios, stats, and recent scores. During the game, the armchair coach earns points by predicting the players' performances, pitch by pitch. At the end of the game, the cumulative total is transmitted to IN's central computer. The score is tabulated, compared with those of other players and then, along with a comparative bar graph, retransmitted via the FM signal. The ultimate goal of the competition: winning a trip to the World Series.

The IN hasn't determined what type of "reward" they can offer to *DOOL* predictors, partially because of the length of time involved, and partly because the skill is different and is less quantitative.

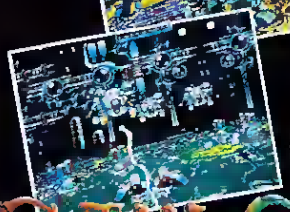
> **"Fans will be able to register opinions on everything, from the general (who will sleep with whom, and when) to the burning issues...."**

The news shows, on the other hand, provide opportunities for subscribers to voice their opinions. The tabulated results are then faxed to advocacy groups around the country, the White House, congressional representatives, and local broadcasters.

Just an info highway rest stop?

Even the video game companies are eying IN technology with interest and speculation. Sega Channel has inked a deal in January to use IN to test the appeal on an interactive subscriber competition for playing Sega Genesis games at home. The joint IN and Sega Channel pilot program was scheduled to occur following a test of Sega Channel in 12 U.S. cities. The IN will allow players to transmit their scores in a 20-second phone call and then compare their scores with other worthy opponents who are participating in the large Network experiment.

IN may appear awkward, but it is evolving and growing as an entertainment product. In addition to drawing viewers out of a passive, yet incredibly comfortable, couch potato existence, *DOOL* aficionados can now prove what they've always known: living a vicarious soap opera life is a demanding hobby. *(Laurie Yates)*



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TEST LAB

Breaking the Sound Barrier

Game players are generally not audiophiles. As a result, there is an information gap, or barrier if you will, that must be overcome before the players can properly evaluate the multitude of sound choices available to them.

PC sound quality is a function of three distinct factors: input, processing, and output. Gamers have no control over input, only programmers do. Last month, *EG* examined the most common bottleneck in sound performance, the output, which is a function of speakers. This month, *EG* breaks the sound barrier even further by delving into the mechanics of sound processing. Processing is, by far, the most complicated and interesting part of the loop, and is always a function of the installed soundboard.

• ALR MULTIMEDIA EXPRESS

There are a number of different soundboards on the market, all touting their value in an attempt to win the gamer's hard-earned dollar. Those who are happy just to be ahead of a PC speaker might not care about what sort of soundboard they get. Eight- versus 16 Bit, FM synthesis versus wave table, MIDI compatibility, and chip sets are going to make no difference to them, price is the only factor in their purchase.

However, for those who are looking down the road to the multimedia gaming experience, a bit of education might be in order. And in performing that education, it is best to get the basics down from the outset.

To understand how sound processing is performed on the PC, it is first imperative to understand the way sound is stored in a PC. There are two common methods of sound storage; the first is digitized recording and the second is MIDI.

Digitized recording is simply using a PC as a big digital tape deck. Sound, as most people are aware, is simply a wave. This wave contains peaks and valleys that correspond to the low and high volume points of the sound. How close those peaks and valleys are to each other is the frequency; i.e., whether a note is high or low. To digitally record sound the PC "listens" to a wave and records the level of the sound many times a second. This is stored as a numerical value, a byte, inside the computer memory. Later, when the sound is played back, these levels are recreated at the same speed they were recorded. Just as a number of still frames become a movie when they are strung together, these individual bytes are sequenced to recreate the original sound as best it can.

The process of recording is called sampling. The speed at which the sampling occurs is the sample rate. The sample rate is measured in kHz, which is a fancy way of saying thousands of cycles per second. Since the pitch of a sound is determined by how rapidly it cycles, the faster a board can record, the higher the sample rate, and the higher the frequency it can capture. The average human cannot hear sounds over 20 kHz, so any sample rate over 20 kHz would seem, on the surface, to be overkill, but that is not quite the case.

Since most games, and virtually all modern recordings, are in stereo, there is not one input sound to deal with, but two. On some, primarily older, cards the listed sample rate will be for mono operation only, and only half of that number will be available for stereo work. Further, for reasons having to do with some pretty complicated math, to faithfully and accurately reproduce a sound it must be sampled at twice the rate of that sound's highest frequency. Thus, to get an accurate 20 kHz reproduction, the sampling rate must be at least 40 kHz. Since most high-end soundboards today use 40+ kHz (the most common being the CD standard 44.1 kHz), this is not too much of a problem for most sound enthusiasts to handle.

• ALTEC LANSING ACS50 SPEAKERS

In The Chips

The heart of sound processing is in the chips designed to deal with digital sound. Here is a quick overview of some of the more popular and important chip sets used for dealing with sound.

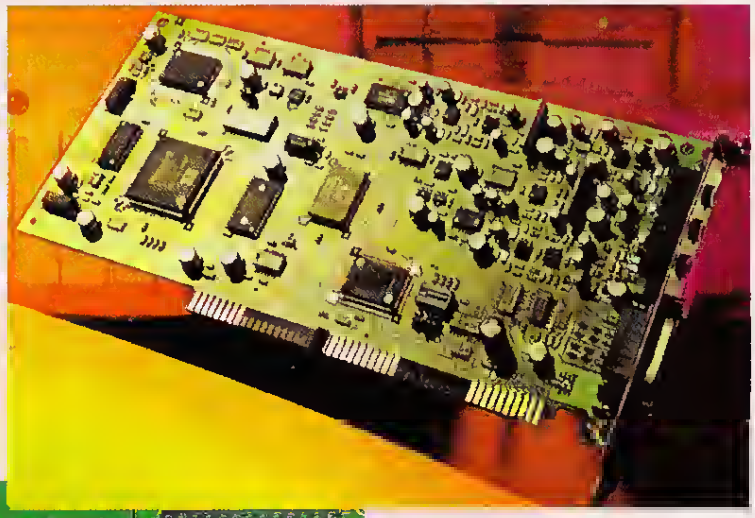
Yamaha OPL series: these chips, starting with the OPL-2, basically founded PC sound, being the heart of the Sound Blaster and AdLib series. Any board that boasts Sound Blaster or AdLib compatibility contains an OPL chip, or an emulator. When buying a board for games it's better to try to get a board including a real OPL chip, as opposed to an emulator. Emulators generally produce lower quality output, and are often clumsy to implement. The OPL-4 generation of these chips offer wave table synthesis, FM synthesis, and general MIDI compatibility, and are backward

Sample rate is only half of the recorded sound picture however. The other half is resolution. As most people are aware, computers store information in numerical chunks called bytes, which are made up of bits. The more bits in a byte, the higher the number stored can be. For example, with 8 bits the highest number that can be stored in a byte is 256. However, a 16-Bit byte can store a number higher than 65,000. The way sound is stored is by taking a measure of size of the sound wave from instant to instant and storing that number. In an 8-Bit board, there are only 256 possible sound levels. However, a 16-Bit board allows 65,000 sound levels. Obviously a marked improvement, creating a much smoother and more accurate sound wave. With the current proliferation of 16-Bit soundboards on the market, the only excuse for buying an 8-Bit board is the most extreme budget. The sound difference is more than worth paying for the extra bits.

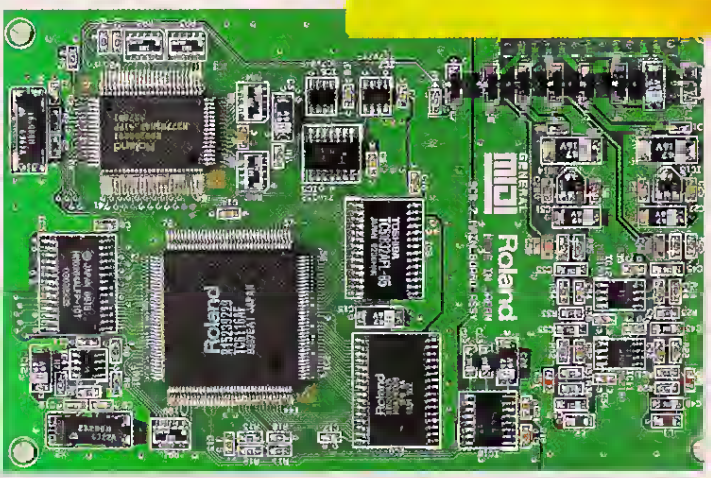
Many games today use digital recordings such as those we are describing, mainly to create voices. But there is a real drawback to this sort of sound recording—space. To store an entire digital "picture" of a sound wave eats up megs of storage space at an amazing rate. A one minute true 44.1 kHz stereo sample eats just over 10.5 MB of memory. Obviously a soundtrack would get out of hand rapidly at this rate. To beat this problem, there is another method of storing music for reproduction: synthesis.

There are two primary forms of synthesis. The oldest is FM synthesis. In FM synthesis, sounds approximating musical instruments are created by the modulation of artificial wave forms inside the computer. While this seemed like a really bright idea back when a PC speaker was cutting edge sound technology, in today's digital CD age the sound produced by this method just isn't adequate. Anyone who has heard an older synthesizer or sound card using FM modulation technology is familiar with listening to the output and trying to figure out just what instrument the output is attempting, however badly, to sound like, because in many cases the sound is more reminiscent of R2D2 than any musical instrument played by humans.

No sooner were FM synthesis cards installed in most PCs than a new technology was emerging: wave table synthesis. In wave table synthesis, instead of modulating random wave forms, a very short recording of an instrument actually playing a pair of notes is stored in a ROM memory table. Then a computer algorithm is used to extrapolate that stored wave to any other note. This way a piano sounds like a piano.



• RAP 10 BOARD BY ROLAND



• ROLAND SOUND CANVAS DB BOARD

As the last sentence indicates, there are still limits to the technology, even today. While wave table synthesis is good, in most implementations it is not perfect. Extremely high and extremely low notes, down or up many octaves from the original sample, can come out distorted. Another problem, albeit a small one, is the limitations of the table itself. To play an instrument, it must be sampled, so a card or synthesizer using this technology is limited to the instruments in its sample table. The higher number of instruments and voices which can be emulated by the card, the more complete the orchestrations performed by that particular board.

The way cards using synthesis are told how to play the music today is generally through Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) files. These files are much smaller than digitally recorded sound files, telling the card what instrument to play and what notes to play in that voice. The most commonly accepted MIDI format is General MIDI, also known as the MPU-401 interface.

This covers the basics of computer sound reproduction and the terminology necessary to understand what is really being offered when one shops the soundboard market. The accompanying sidebar also highlights the various chip sets which are being used to perform sound processing. Next month, *EG* will present an in depth feature article evaluating a number of the current generation high-end sound cards using these technologies, some well and some not so well. *(Ed Dille)*

compatible with earlier versions of the chip.

Roland Sound Canvas Chip set: for making music, these chips are the Cadillac of sound. Sound Canvas chips include MIDI and have excellent samples and synthesizer capabilities. Roland isn't trying to be particularly game compatible, but games which work with MIDI will be able to use the Roland to produce excellent sound.

Ensoniq: the Ensoniq chip set is based on the Motorola 68EC000 processor and 2 MB of Ensoniq wave table instrument samples. Ensoniq's own boards, as well as the Reveal Sound FX Wave 32 use this chip set, which emulates OPL compatible FM synthesis.

EMU8000: this chip is the heart of the new Sound Blaster AWE32, and offers full 16-Bit capabilities and extensive wave table synthesis. An OPL-3 chip is bundled with this unit, at least on the AWE-32, to provide full compatibility with the Yamaha family.

Ultrasound: the Advanced Gravis Ultrasound series of boards, and their ancillary chip sets, are superb sampling synthesis units. This chip set is used in some of Gravis' higher-end boards to create basically low-end studio quality recording and mixing equipment. While OPL is software emulated by this chip set, many games are starting to support the Ultrasound chip set directly.

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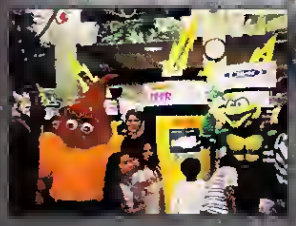

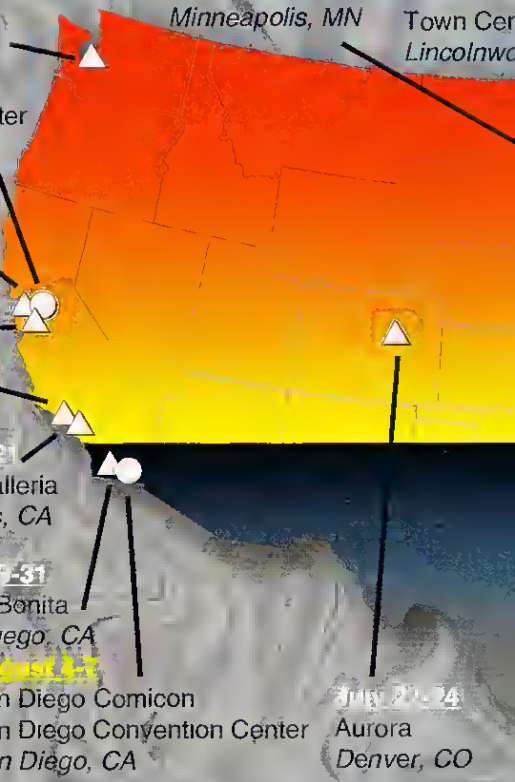

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September 2-4
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August 26-28
Valco Fashion Center
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August 12-14
Del Amo Fashion
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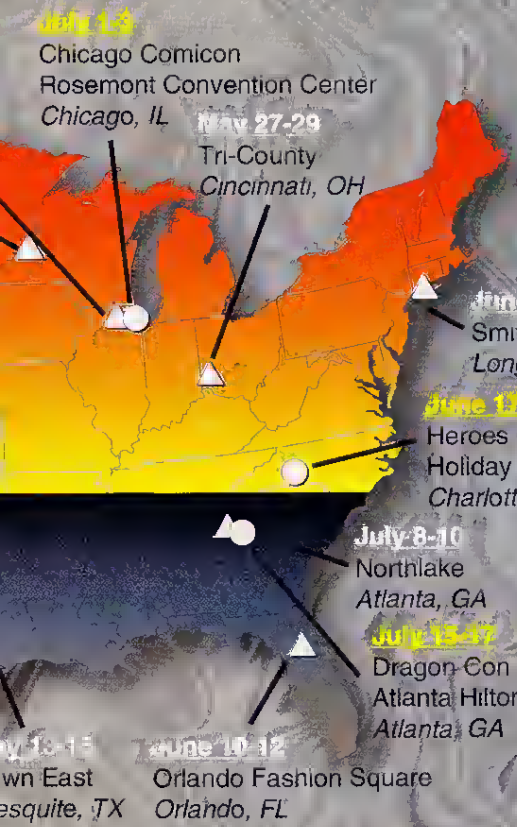

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June 17-19
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LIGHTS, CAMERA, INTERACTION

"CompuServe is something of the Cadillac of the on-line world... A higher end crowd and, as a result, an often more polite one."

Step back for a moment and imagine the electronic information spectrum as the theater district of a large city. Near the center of the district, done up in gold leaf and fine terra cotta work, would be an older, more distinguished, theater than most of the rest. Not run down, just slightly more comfortable, slightly more rooted, than some of its newer brethren. This would be CompuServe, the undisputed granddaddy of all the consumer on-line services.

Stepping into this grand old theater and looking around we can see seats for about 2,000,000, most of which are rather new looking, a far cry from the 1200 members who started with the fledgling service in 1979. The growth rate for CompuServe was 43 percent in 1993.

Who attends the galas produced on-line? Well, CompuServe is something of the Cadillac of the on-line world. Their prices, while not out of the range of competition, are a bit steeper than most services. Looking around at the people filling this theater, one sees a user reflecting the service. Almost 70 percent are college educated. The average income is $93,000. A higher end crowd and, as a result, an often more polite one.

In some of the newer services, the audience can get a bit rowdy. Prodigy, for instance, has had more than its share of conflict regarding the censorship of messages. AOL has the ubiquitous "TOS (Terms of Service) Cops" looking for violations of policy on the burgeoning new service. But here things are a little more settled, a bit more sedate.

"We have only had to terminate seven or eight accounts in the last few years. The users tend to police themselves. If someone is acting inappropriately for the service, older members will point this out to them," says Debra Young, of CompuServe's Corporate Communications.

"That's one thing I really like, there is no sense of censorship. I don't like the feeling of someone looking over my shoulder," says Bill Grunnah, who has been a CompuServe member since he was in college in 1980.

Grunnah has seen a lot of changes in the service, and one of the biggest is in the composition of the users.

"The nature of the people using the service has really changed. In the beginning it was computer jocks. Now computer jocks are in the minority. At that time, and you have to remember this was before the PC, all of the conversations were about systems. Now people talk about anything," he continued.

If it seems like there are an awful lot of seats in this theater, the stage is just right for the number of people in the audience: huge. Over 2000 services with more than 600 forums form the planks and rigging of CompuServe. There are numerous interactive games, financial services, on-line chat areas and forums about everything from disabilities to science fiction to flight simulators. The tremendous number of services allows for diversity in the way people use CompuServe.

"I spend about 80 percent of my time on-line in three games that I like," says Grunnah, who works with commercial real estate in his off-line life. "I also spend some time going into the Microsoft Support forums to find information for my sideline of programming."

Dave Peyton, a newspaper columnist who co-wrote "How to Get the Most Out of CompuServe," uses the service for a lot of tasks, many of them professional.

In one case, Peyton was contacted by the local head of the animal shelter regarding a letter offering to buy animals by the pound to make food for restaurants.

• COMPUSERVE

"The Animal Shelter Director was just enraged. She said 'I can't believe this guy is doing this. What's going on here?' So the first thing I did when I got home was get on the Humane Society forum on CompuServe, and I started reading the messages. Sure enough, this was a form letter sent out to hundreds of animal shelters and dog pounds throughout the United States. The Humane Society people said they were investigating."

Peyton told the director of the local shelter to sit tight until the investigation showed some results.

"Two days later they found out it was part of a gigantic hoax. This guy who was a known hoaxer was sending these things out for no other reason apparently than to create a hoax," said Peyton.

"I use the service a lot for things like this; checking out facts and doing research."

But of course, just like any theater with a big stage, CompuServe requires a huge team of people backstage to make things happen. Over 2000 people are employed making sure the show goes on, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"Backstage, where Gregory makes the magic happen, is a computer room that would look at home in NASA's mission control."

The theater manager at CompuServe, the man who actually makes sure the physical end of the service runs, is Mike Gregory, the Director of Operations. Backstage, where Gregory makes the magic happen, is a computer room that would look at home in NASA's Mission Control. Dozens of terminals are arrayed in a nerve center, constantly monitoring the system. Out in the center of the room, the squat figures of CompuServe's custom mainframes are situated like a dwarven army ready to march to war. On the far end of the room, newer, smaller, PCs sit in racks stretching almost to the ceiling.

"We have had so much expansion in the last couple of years we are barely keeping up," Gregory says, guiding visitors around an exposed wiring pit in the

• COMPUSERVE

floor where technicians are checking cables.

"Careful, this is a working computer room," he says needlessly.

And a working computer room it is. With hundreds of mainframes and dedicated PCs holding over 700 gigs of on-line data, it is indeed the biggest working computer room most people are ever likely to see.

The major job involved with keeping the system running is a process called load balancing, making sure that there is the computing capacity present in the right amounts in the right services when called by one of the 2,000,000 audience members hungry for data and challenging games to play.

"We know when our peak times are going to be, and how many members are going to be on the system. The number of users is confidential but I can tell you that our peak load is going to be on a Monday or a Tuesday, around 10:30 in the evening," Gregory says.

But external factors can change the delicate balance of the load. The weather is one example. In times of bad weather it is only natural that CompuServe members are going to be more interested in getting data about mother nature.

"Just in case, we put out more resources for the weather when it is hurricane season." He said.

While the average load is known, the staff keeps track of world events to make sure they will be able to predict usage patterns.

"We know that on an average day when nothing is going on it [the news services] is going to have so many people, but when events happen, we want to be able to gear up."

However as one looks around back stage, there are many areas where 'under construction' signs stand out against the crew, lights, and props. CompuServe isn't going to stand by and be outdone by the newer theaters in the district.

"We are working on a number of things right now, all based on making the service better for the user," Debra Young says.

One is improving the mail.

"We are working on allowing people to pick their own address, or alias, thus making it easier for people to give their mail address."

Multimedia is also coming into its own on CompuServe, with the release of a new CD-ROM designed to work with the service. Although the movement of high-end data through this conduit is still limited by bandwidth, Compuserve, DeIphi, and others are striving to correct this situation.

And the particularly astute might notice the open back door of the theater. No, people aren't trying to crash the show; by fall CompuServe should have full connectivity to the Internet, allowing members to enter the slightly less tamed areas of the electronic data stream. Because of proactive management and increasing awareness of user needs, the theater that is CompuServe might be the Grand Old Dame of the avenue, but it is no danger of falling into disrepair. This historic venue should keep getting first run shows for many interactive years to come.

(Ed Dille & John Withers)

The Box Seats

In any big theater there are the box seats reserved for the monied, and Theater CompuServe is no exception to this sometimes unjust rule. And like any other theater, the patrons who must sit on the floor level will crane their necks to try to see inside those boxes. Catching this view at CompuServe is a bit harder than at a normal theater, but from the edge of the balcony, with powerful opera glasses, it is possible to make these patrons out.

For instance, in the biggest and best positioned box sits Visa USA, which uses the CompuServe network for their card verifications. Every time a Visa card is put into a point of sale terminal in the United States, it travels over the CompuServe network to be verified. These types of accounts are common to many services, which use their excess bandwidth to work with meeting the needs of bigger commercial concerns needing to move data nationwide in a large scale.

Also in the boxes are the people who fly the friendly skies. "The crews of most major airlines are scheduled through the service," she continues. When a member of a flight crew logs onto CompuServe with their special account and password, they are greeted with a familiar Welcome to CompuServe message, but the screen beyond the message is alien to the rest of the users of the service: a multiple choice menu allowing crews to see the current schedule of flights and allowing them to bid on a specific flight.

So the next time CompuServe members take a flight or see a Visa card being used, they should feel in good company—with or without opera glasses to shorten the distance between them.

BREATH OF FIRE

Questing exciting and mysterious lands has never been better

Role-playing video games have been growing in popularity over the last few years. Of these, there seems to be two distinct choices: American RPGs—most of which are conversions of popular computer games like Wizardry and Ultima—and Japanese RPGs. The RPGs from Japan are more cartoon-like and have a look and feel all their own. There have been several RPG series in Japan that have proved so popular, new releases are treated in similar fashion as major motion pictures. The **Dragon Warrior** series is now in its fifth installment and the **Final Fantasy** series is in its sixth.

Now, the company that developed the **Final Fantasy** series, is releasing the game **Breath of Fire**, here in the United States. The game was actually developed by Capcom of Japan, and licensed to Square Soft for release in the United States. If one did not know this, it would be easy to mistake this game for a Square Soft developed game.

The game interface is very basic, as are the controls. Of the eight buttons on the SNES control pads, **Breath of Fire** only uses four; the "A," "B," "Start," and "Select" buttons. The "A" button is used to make all selections during the game. **Breath of Fire** is an intellectual game rather than an action one. The only real action of the game is in walking around and exploring the character's surroundings. While the level of interaction is high, the game does not rely on reflexes to do well. There are tons of characters in the towns to talk with and plenty of places to explore. To accomplish either, just guide your character to the desired spot and press the "A" button. From there just follow the instructions. Other places like shops and the Field Command screen are based on a series of menus. Selections are made with the control pad and the "A" button. To go back one step in the selection process, just press the "B" button (the only use for this button).

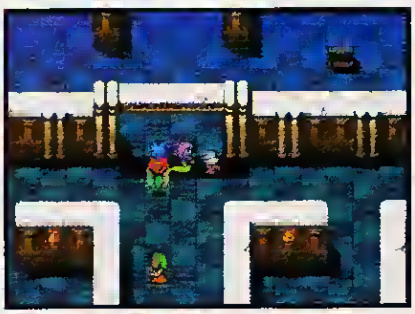
TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	**Square Soft**
SYSTEM:	**SNES**
THEME:	**RPG**
MEGABITS:	**12 Meg**
PLAYERS:	**1**
LEVELS:	**N/A**

The "Select" button is used to call up the Field Command screen and to check the Maximum Hit Points and Magic Points of your characters during a battle.

The "Start" button is used to look at the Map during the game.

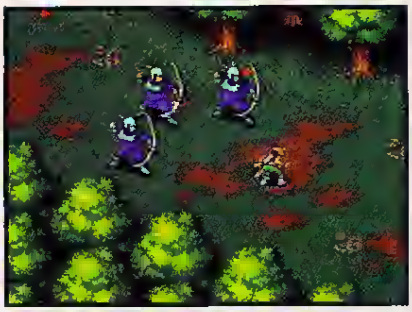
The story is simple and somewhat formulated. There are the good guys and the bad guys—the Light Dragon Clan and the Dark Dragon Clan—and of course a world to save. The adventure is long and will take our heroes to towns, castles, and towers; traveling over land, sea, and air.



There are eight characters to take control of in this game, and the player can control any four of them at one time (once the characters have been found and agree to join the party). For the most part, the game will dictate which of the characters will be in your party at any one time. However, sometimes the player will have to choose among the characters. It is important to be aware of the different characters' abilities when choosing who will form the party, since a wrong choice could mean death for everyone.

The characters are as follows: the Hero (you get to name him) who will be the main character throughout the game; Nina, the princess who can fly and use magic; Bo, the forest creature who can hunt for food and navigate your party through otherwise impassible forests; Karn, the thief who is useful when it becomes necessary to open chests or locked doors; Gobi, a sailor and a merchant who will sell items to your party and can use some magic; Ox, a strong but slow fighter; Bleu, a master magician who will be able to provide the party with many useful spells; and finally Mogu, a "warrior" (animal?) who can dig passages to travel underground.

Many of the places to visit and explore in this game are fairly standard. There are inns to sleep in at night and recover lost



hit points and magic points. Unlike many games, you can not save the game at the Inns, rather you must go to a Dragon Shrine and talk to the Dragon statue. He will save your place in the game.

There are multitudes of shops to visit during your journey also. Weapon Shops carry both weapons and armor for the discriminating adventurer, and Item Shops offer food and medicines. There are also Storage buildings for you to house some of the items you have collected during your adventures, which is particularly useful when the space in the party's backpacks starts to run short.

There are also a lot of people to interact with in the various towns. Speak with everyone as information may be the most important key to completing this game.

At the start of the game, the player is

asked to name the Hero. Although there will be times during the game when this character is not with the party, this is the main character and leader for the adventure. After a name is chosen the game opens in the town of Drogen. The story starts to unfold as you find out that "The Dard Dragons have amassed an army and have begun to take the land by force." It would seem that you are the Hero the world has been waiting for and there is no better time than the present to get out there and start saving humanity (or possibly Dragonkind).

The manual includes 35 steps toward completing the game. This will take the player about two-thirds of the way through the game, though the order that the hints are layed out are not necessarily in the same order that the player will complete the tasks.

The adventure is long (I thought that this was a 16-Meg cart originally, when it is really only a 12-Meg game), and there are many small sub-quests that players may wish to complete. This game is considerably longer than Square's own **Final Fantasy II**, which many players complained was too easy. Although the level of difficulty here is not extremely high, there are certainly enough puzzles to attract most role-players, and enough of a story to keep even advanced gamers interested through completion.

The graphics here are among the best ever for this type of SNES game. Role-players traditionally do not have graphics as advanced as other types of games. The general thought among gamers is that the game play is more important than the graphics in this sort of game. While that may be true, it is not an excuse for companies to slack off when producing this sort of game. Square Soft is generally very conscious of this factor as was Capcom when programming this game. All of the scenes are well drawn, and during the battle sequences, the monsters are well animated and occasionally quite gruesome. I will actually be a little surprised if the Zombies make it through Nintendo's final edits, as they have no lower portion of a body, only a torso, arms, and a head.

The sounds are also quite well done, although the music does become a little repetitious when playing for long periods of time.

And if the key to a good RPG is in the game play, one need not worry here. Every menu is carefully thought out, every town and tower has small items to help make the game more playable. Early on, players will discover places to drink water and restore their hit points and magic points, and before entering a difficult battle, often times there will be a Dragon Shrine in which to save the game.

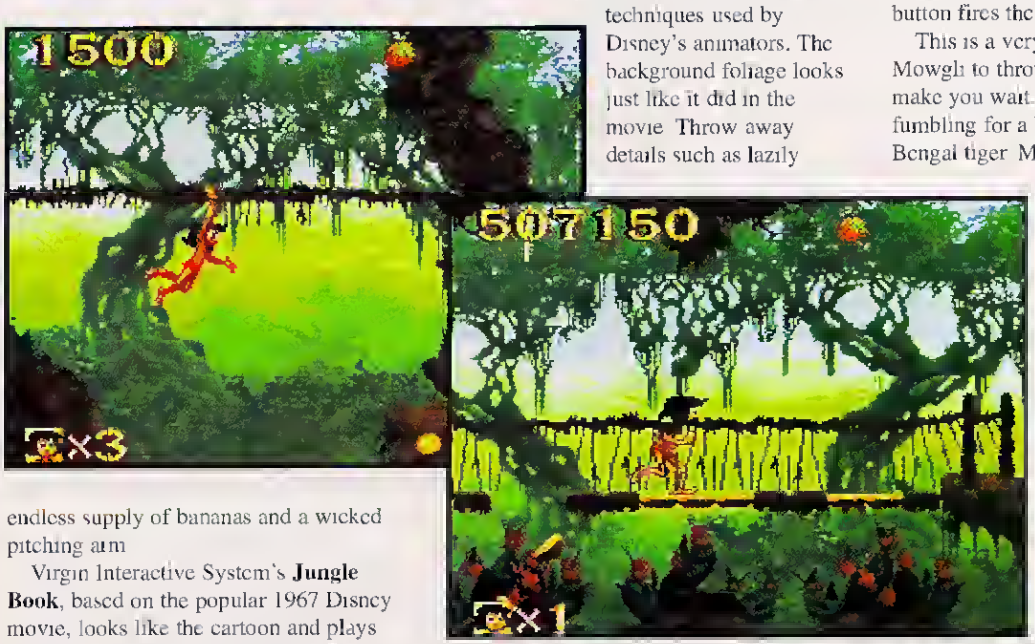
Breath of Fire contains all of the necessary elements of a top-notch RPG. Square Soft took great care in translating Capcom's masterpiece, and in making an enjoyable adventure for all levels of gamers. The only major question that entered my mind while playing this is "Why did Capcom give this game up and release **Wizardry V** and **Eye of the Beholder** instead?" Indeed, the RPGs Capcom opted to release were good games and decent translations of their computer counterparts, but **Breath of Fire** is superior in every way to the other games.

While some may not care for Japanese RPGs, those who do are sure to find something to like in **Breath of Fire**. I give it my highest rating and my strongest recommendation. **A+** *(Marc Camron)*

JUNGLE BOOK

The man-cub does his thing in an unforgiving jungle

Mowgli, the man-cub, is alone in the vast jungles of India. He's young and inexperienced, a skinny boy that would make a fine meal for a tiger or a giant snake. Just about everyone in his world is out to stop him, but Mowgli will defeat them all. He's got a secret weapon—an endless supply of bananas and a wicked pitching arm.



Virgin Interactive System's **Jungle Book**, based on the popular 1967 Disney movie, looks like the cartoon and plays like a dream. Like the movie, Virgin's **Jungle Book** follows Mowgli's trek through dense jungles in search of the man-village. On his way, he meets such colorful jungle folk as Kaa, the giant boa, Colonel Hathi, the pompous elephant, and Louie, the king of the apes. He also faces Shere Khan, a suave and murderous tiger that looms larger than life.

In order to get to the village, Mowgli must cut his way through legions of coconut-lobbing monkeys, swarms of insects, and thousands of spitting cobras. How does one spindly-legged boy fare against all of that wild nature? As you probably guessed, nature doesn't stand a chance.

Mowgli is no average man cub. Whether swinging from trees or scaling the crumbling walls of an ancient temple, this playful waif has the agility of an Olympic gymnast. What other video game hero can leap from a tree, cartwheel off the back of an angry boar, and catch a swinging vine all in a single bound?

Genesis graphics haven't looked so good since **Ecco**! Virgin's animation team matched the color schemes and drawing techniques used by Disney's animators. The background foliage looks just like it did in the movie. Throw away details such as lazily circling flies add personality to the scenes.

Backdrops and foregrounds are not the only art in this game. Mowgli's body movements are subtle and lifelike. When he hangs from vines his limbs swing with just the right momentum. The antagonistic monkeys dangling from the trees move so freely that they look hand drawn. Belt them with a banana and they fall.

Virgin's patented sense of humor is another fine point in this game. In the opening screen, Kaa slithers down from the top of the television screen and dangles above the Sega logo. The fun continues. Leave Mowgli in one place for too long and he dances or starts juggling bananas. When he loses a life, the screen turns black and monkey medics carry him away on a stretcher. As the game moves on, Kaa and Louie steal the show.

The controls in **Jungle Book** are straightforward. The C button controls jumps. The A button selects Mowgli's weapon; deadly bananas, double bananas, boomerangs, a trusty pea shooter, or the mysterious invincibility mask. The B button fires the chosen weapon.

This is a very responsive game. Tell Mowgli to throw a banana and he doesn't make you wait. Nothing's worse than fumbling for a banana while facing a Bengal tiger. Mowgli is equally manageable when told to jump and climb.

That control is important. While the challenges in **Jungle Book** are fairly easy, Mowgli has a lot of ground to cover. Each level has 15 hidden gems and a missing friend. In order to complete the level, Mowgli must find most of those gems and the friend. If he finds all 15 gems, he gets a bonus round in which to load up on bananas and weapons.

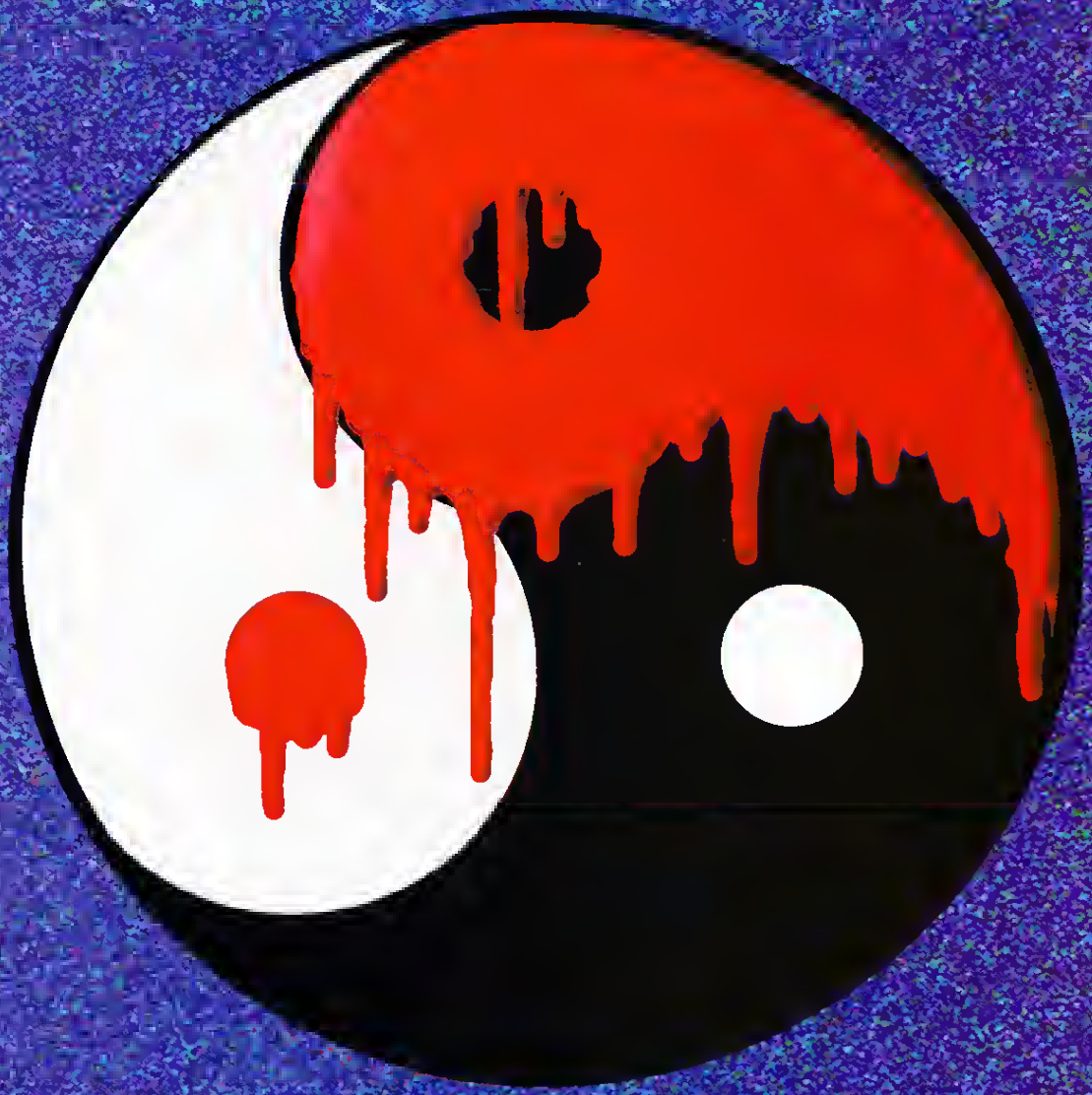
Aladdin was one of the best-selling Sega games of 1993. Because of that success, comparison with **Jungle Book** is inevitable. These games are very similar. Aladdin throws apples. Mowgli pitches bananas. Both games combine running, climbing, and precision jumping. The biggest similarity is the flawless animation. Both games capture the spirit of the Disney movies.

Jungle Book is less violent than **Aladdin**. There are no knife throwers or guards in these jungles of India. So what if Mowgli bounces off animals and throws lethal fruit? Desperate times call for desperate measures. Overall, **Jungle Book** is better than **Aladdin**, though it is certainly a bit easier.

Disney and Virgin have a good thing going. **Beauty and the Beast** and **Little Mermaid** games have already been created. **Aladdin** was a best-seller and, barring the end of civilization, **Jungle Book** will be too. **A-** *(Steven L. Kent)*

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	Virgin
SYSTEM:	Genesis
THEME:	Arcade
MEGABITS:	16
PLAYERS:	1
LEVELS:	10

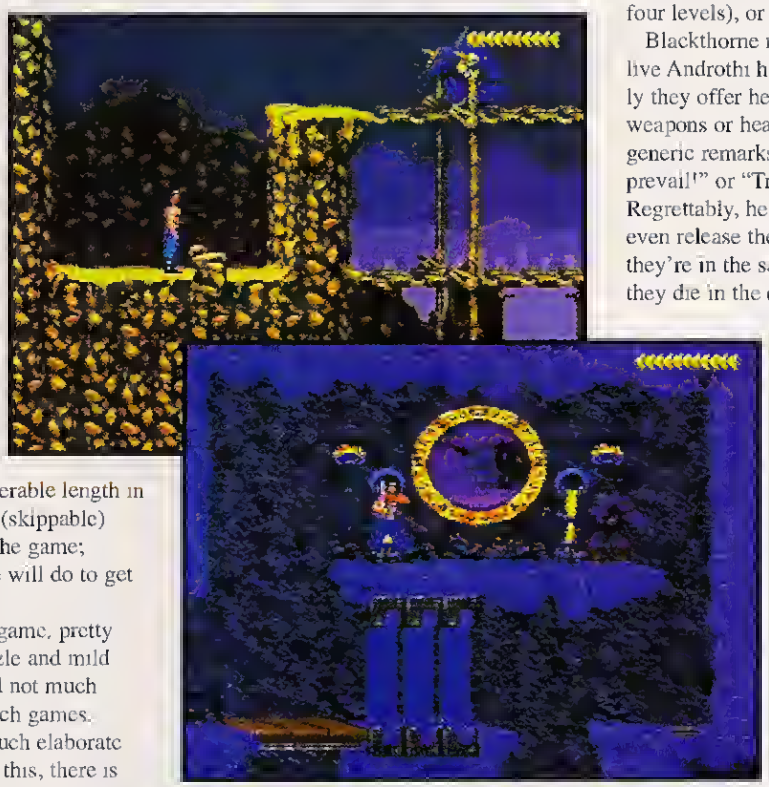


FIND THE WAY...

BLACKTHORNE

Level by level, it gets tougher to make the grade

Kyle Blackthorne, raised on Earth and trained in armed and unarmed combat, is really the prince of another world called Tuul. To protect Kyle and the powerful Light Stone from the evil Sarlac, who killed King Vlaros, his father, the Seer Galadril sent him (with the talisman) to our world as a boy. Now a mercenary, framed for war crimes, Blackthorne escapes from a U.N. prison in East Africa, and is magically returned to Tuul, his memories slowly coming back.



No, wait! This isn't the game, yet. It's the background story, told at considerable length in the manual. There is also a (skippable) introduction at the start of the game; details differ, but either one will do to get the player into the mood.

All right, it's a platform game, pretty much linear, with both puzzle and mild shoot-'em-up elements, and not much more real plot than most such games. (That is the problem with such elaborate introductions to games like this, there is rarely any satisfactory sense of conclusion to the story even when the player succeeds in getting through all the levels.) The fact is, regardless of whether one is really caught up in the idea of vanquishing evil, the process of getting Kyle Blackthorne through all 17 levels (four each in four areas, plus a final boss level in the last area) does become absorbing.

What's so appealing about it? Well, the graphics are great, with well-rendered backgrounds and enough frames of animation for most characters to provide a lifelike appearance to their activities. Blackthorne's movements approach the natural level of **Prince of Persia**. They include walking, running, jumping, climbing (with or without ladders), shooting forward or behind, crouching, and rolling. Many of these can be with or without gun in hand. If he's asked to wait (while the player decides what to do next or takes a phone call), he reloads his gun or, if the gun's put away, check his Light Stone.

When exchanging fire with the goblin-like enemies, the standing Blackthorne can hide in the shadows. So can the enemies, and the battles resemble the classic B-movie sequences where the antagonists pull themselves into niches, occasionally pecking out to shoot. It works.

Incidentally, if the game is left alone for quite a while (as for that phone call), the screen blacks out, save for a spotlight effect that plays over the scene randomly. It's a good screen-saver technique.

The animation is not confined to Blackthorne. Throughout the game, there are not only the bad guys, who have all sorts of nasty names like Ka'dra'suul, Grag'ohr (or Gragg), and Whar'ork (not forgetting Sarlac), but also good guys, the Androthi. Most have several frames of their own animation, with enough transitionals for smooth movement, and some have walking, standing, and (oh, yes) dying views as well. Bodies do not vanish, they remain where they fall, but do not impede progress. (Live Androthi do sometimes get in the way, inadvertently, because the control feature for talking to them and for climbing are the same, so if they're standing where Blackthorne wants to climb, he finds himself listening to them instead. This, too, can resemble real life.)

The Androthi are the members of the race enslaved by Sarlac, and while many are mobile, others are to be found zapping minerals in the mine (location of the first four levels), or languishing in chains.

Blackthorne may stop and talk to any live Androthi he encounters, and frequently they offer helpful clues or even weapons or health potions. Others make generic remarks like, "The Androthi will prevail!" or "Traitors are scum!" Regrettably, he cannot recruit them or even release the chained ones. Often, if they're in the same chamber as an enemy, they die in the crossfire.

Weapons and power-ups are often found upon destruction of enemies, though less frequently deeper in the game, which starts out easy and gets tougher gradually. This lets the player work up to the hard stuff. There's even a quick tutorial segment for practicing the controls. But there is never time pressure. Blackthorne moves at the player's pace.

The enemies get tougher. A goblin-like Gragg that dies with one shot in the first level of the Mine area may take three or four in the Tree area's levels, many in the Sand area, and can be real trouble in the Castle. There appear to be indefinite continues, and passwords allow restarting at the level achieved in the last play session.

The sounds and music (either of which may be optionally shut off) are supportive without being obtrusive. The music is properly martial, with the occasional hint of choppers in the near distance (maybe it is all a fever dream as Kyle hides in the jungle?), but the loop does not soon get tiresome. Sound effects consist largely of gunshots, grunts of effort when Blackthorne jumps, grunts of pain from an enemy hit and dying squeals from the man-eating tentacle plants (called Eckers) that dot later levels.

There is nothing spectacularly new in Blackthorne, but the course of the game is handled as well and better than most. Best of all, it's got that whatever-it-is that keeps one coming back to try for the next level. **B+** *(Ross Chamberlain)*

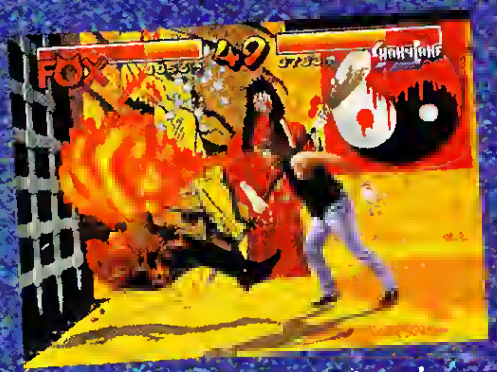
TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	**Interplay**
SYSTEM:	**SNES**
THEME:	**Platform adventure**
MEGABITS:	**16**
PLAYERS:	**1**
LEVELS:	**17**

WAY of the WARRIOR

Over 500 megs of hard hitting, 32-bit, 30 frames-per-second action. (More arcade-like than anything on the street!).

3-D modeled, parallaxing arenas with dynamic camera zooming. (More than meets the eye!)



60 to 80 unique moves, specials, and terminations per character. (More than mere mortals can handle!)

Nine characters plus two 3-D rendered BOSS characters. (More if you know the Way...)

universal interactive studios

3DO

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WORLD HEROES

There's nothing new to fight over here

TECH SPECS	
PUBLISHER:	Sega
SYSTEM:	Genesis
THEME:	Fighting
MEGABITS:	16
PLAYERS:	1-2
LEVELS:	N/A

There are already so many lame rip-offs of **Mortal Kombat** that one would think designers and gamers alike would be burned out on the whole genre. **World Heroes** is the newest home entry in the contested Lamest Clone Competition.

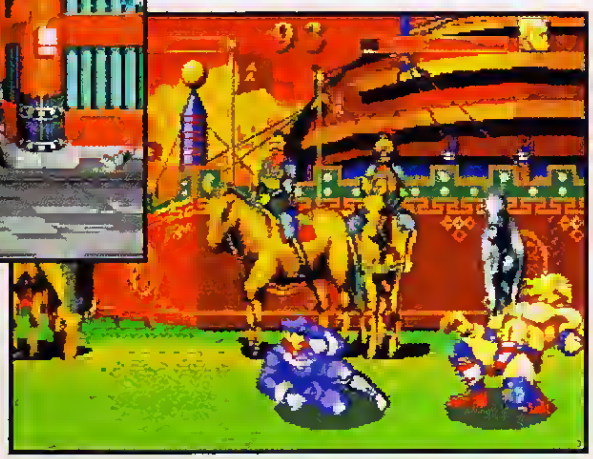
Things start off with a terrible picture of a digitized globe that zooms in on the Title Screen. The picture is so pixilated it could be the digitized image of any round, blue and white object. This is only a sign of things to come.

After a difficulty level is chosen, a wild-eyed anonymous character appears and tells us we have come at a good time. The printed text then instructs the player to take the time machine (as if there were an actual plot to the game) and "go to where the strong people are." It seems that there are only eight strong people on the planet and all of them are street-brawling, fist-fighting, magic-slinging goons. After telling the player that he is praying for a healthy battle (Huh?), the still anonymous character disappears and we go on to pick our potential world hero.

The player chooses one of eight surrogates, each excelling in some imaginary, mystical fighting style. Each has a series of special moves that are accessed by doing ergonomically improbable things with the control pad. The cast is familiar to any passing fan of fighting games; two brothers, one blond, one dark haired, who have very similar fighting styles, a shirtless kung fu fighter, a cute girl with a big sword, and a German guy who fights a lot like M. Bison. Also appearing are a Hulk Hogan clone, a magic using monk, and the obligatory big, tough, sadistic, Russian opponent. Can you say "shamelessly derivative?"

There are four levels of difficulty, Easy, Normal, Hard, and MVR. MVR is the most difficult, equal to the arcade version. On the Easy level, the player can take one hero and casually destroy the other fighters. This allows gamers to get to the end of the game very quickly, as there are only eight matches total.

There are two modes of play, Normal and Death Match. Normal pits the player's hero against the other opponents, amidst a variety of different international locales, none of which can be identified as anyplace in particular.



Death Match pits the player's hero against seven other opponents in a dangerous arena surrounded with spikes, flames, or lethal electric currents, amidst, again, a variety of international locales, none of which (surprise!) are identifiable as any place in particular.

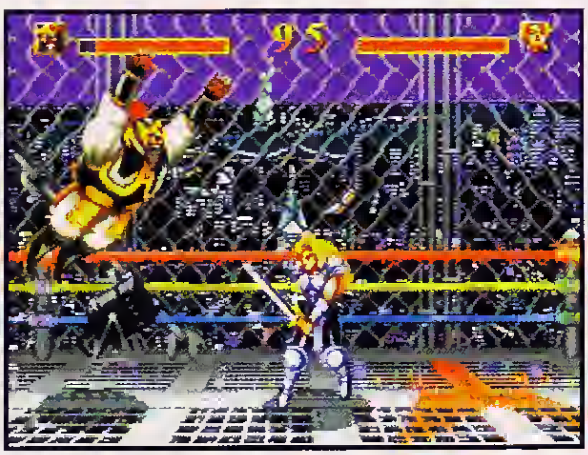
After a match is over, the winner, in a line of text, says something patently stupid, i.e., "With an ego like mine, there's no way I can lose." The player is given three continues with which to complete the game. In the Easy difficulty setting, this is more than enough. At the higher settings, completing the game will take some practice, but why bother? There is nothing to distinguish **World Heroes** from any other generic fighting game, and it offers nothing that can't be found done better elsewhere.

Aside from the bad opening, the graphics are only mediocre. It's hard to believe that this was in the arcades only two years ago. There's nothing wrong with them per se, but there are so many games that look better than this one.

Sound is a different story. There is some supremely ignorable music here, but the digitized voices and sound effects are nothing short of irritating. Janne, the cute girl with the sword, has a scream that is so bad, it can't conceivably be a digitized human voice. It is simply awful. When M. Power (the Hulk Hogan clone) says, "Numba wan" in his thick Japanese accent, it is funny, but this is an unintentional bright spot in desolate terrain.

All of this does not mean that **World Heroes** is unplayable. There is a fairly solid fighting game engine beneath the deck, but if all you want is a good fight, there are plenty of games that deliver it in a better package.

World Heroes is just another in a long line of one-on-one fighting games that came from the arcade, but probably should have stayed there. If it was a second rate clone of **Mortal Kombat** in the arcades, it's a third rate job at home on the Genesis. The graphics are next to primitive, the sound annoying, the game play derivative. But many 12-year-olds will probably like it, and that, apparently, is all that counts for this particular fighting game. ■ *(John Wesley Hardin)*



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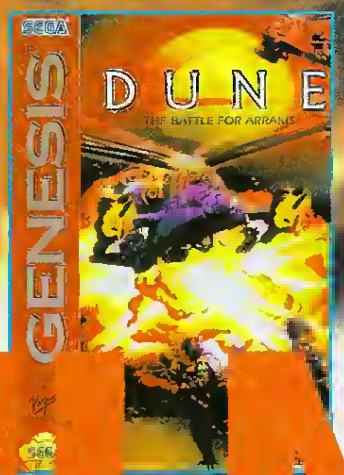

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MLBPA BASEBALL

Baseball for the statistically challenged

MLBPA Baseball is an attempt to create a hybrid of user friendly arcade baseball games and hard-core games that bristle with stats. With the MLBPA license, every player in the big leagues is here, complete with stats, but they're handled in a way that more casual fans of baseball can cope with.

There are four modes of play: One Game, League Playoffs, The Series, and Full Season. League Playoffs is a best-of-seven-games series for both leagues. Winners of League Playoffs go on to the series. The Series allows the player to bypass the season and go straight to the big time. Gamers play a best of seven championships between the league pennant winners. Full season is just that, a full season of 162 games, complete with post-season play for division and league champs. It's all or nothing here. There are no half or short season options, so settle in for the long haul if you want to play ball.

Of course, players don't have to play every game. There is a simulation option that lets the player simulate any number of games in the series, so, technically, players don't have to play any games in the season if they don't want to.

MLBPA appears less stat driven than some of the competition. The statistical simulation is a bit more transparent. This is a tradeoff that the statistically inclined may not like, but it pays off. It has more of an arcade feel, and it's easier to get the hang of batting and pitching here than, say, **Hardball '94**. Gamers won't be able to just jump in, though. Even when playing a single game, there are several options and choices to be made and, of course, the player has to pick a team and an opponent. But the actual acts of pitching and batting are more obvious and intuitive.

There is no Manage-only Option, but players can opt to have the Genesis control all of their batters and fielders, so the only thing the player has to worry about is pitching the ball and fielding. Even when the Genesis is controlling the fielders, the player still has to make them throw to the bases. This gives the manager something exciting to do.

Graphics-wise, **MLBPA** is unexceptional. Nothing looks bad, but nothing catches the eye. The rotoscoped batters and pitchers have fewer frames of animation than their counterparts in some other baseball sims. Since there's no Major League Baseball license, there are no real games, team names, or logos. Players can't customize the team colors or names, and one ballpark looks like another. When a home run or other big play is made, the scoreboard displays a bit of digitized video footage, like ballplayers high-fiving and such. There are different clips for different plays, but none of them look that great.

The perspective is also a little too static. The player never sees the entire outfield at once. When the ball is in play, the view tracks the ball. This looks fairly impressive, but players must resort to positioning and tracking fielders, and the ball, via a little radar type display in the middle of the right hand side.

This makes things difficult for the player and more than one will watch in dismay as three fielders miss a simple grounder because the view and the radar didn't exactly agree on where the ball was. It's not a huge problem. The player eventually learns to read the display, but it sure is annoying at first.

Speaking of watching in dismay, the Instant Replay Mode allows critical fans to go back and relive past humiliations over and over. See those mistakes in reverse, fast-forward or frame by frame. This is also a good feature for savoring those times when the player does well.

A rich soundtrack complements the action. The crowd noise really sounds like a crowd, and the stadium organ sounds more authentic than most. It seems to have a wider variety of tunes than the ones in other games. Background music noodles along in the option screens. The umpire's calls are made in clear digitized speech. Different inflections were recorded for the same calls, so the umpire sounds different every time he calls "safe" or "out."

MLBPA Baseball supports four-way play, with each player manning a different team. A battery back-up saves a season in progress, scores, and league standings.

MLBPA ranks solidly in the low end of top-end baseball carts for the Genesis. It's certainly not the best available, but gamers could do worse. For the sports fan who wants a detailed game with a real baseball feel, this is probably not it. If you want a readily playable, accessible sports game with fewer frills, MLBPA could score a hit. **B-** *(John Wesley Hardin)*

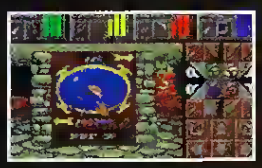
TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	**Electronic Arts**
SYSTEM:	**Genesis**
THEME:	**Sports**
MEGABITS:	**16**
PLAYERS:	**1-4**
LEVELS:	**N/A**

An RPG You Can Really Sink Your Excsymyr* Into.

In the universe of role-playing games, there are many pretenders to the throne. Most are no deeper than a castle moat. But if you thirst for a role-playing adventure that has more to offer than just a mace and a potion, seek out *Dungeon Master II: Skullkeep*. It offers more characters, creatures and puzzles that require all the cunning and wit you can conjure up... without chanting.

Dungeon Master II
SKULLKEEP



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HARDBALL '94

Looking better than ever and ready for action in '94

Hardball '94 is the latest rev of the venerable **Hardball** engine, and this time out it's running smoother and looking better than ever. It's deeper than ever before, as well, with an incredible number of options and variables available to the player. Also new for '94 is an MLBPA license. Now, gamers can play on or captain a team with all their favorite ballplayers.

There are three modes of play: Exhibition Game, League, and Batting Practice. Each mode accommodates two players, except for Batting Practice, which is for a solo gamer only. Exhibition Game allows the gamer to pit any two teams against each other. League allows for short, half, or full season play. Batting Practice takes a batter and a pitcher of the player's choice and lets the player swat away. There's also a Home Run Derby game available during batting practice. The batter receives 20 pitches worth varying points depending on how well and how far they are hit. A home run is worth 1000 points. This makes improving one's batting skill much more fun and easy.

League play is the heart of **Hardball '94**. It features the new 1994 league/division format, and utilizes '93 roster/player stats. Another new feature lets the player become the owner of one or two teams of the player's choice. As the owner of a team, the player can edit his team's roster to select the dream-team lineup he wants. The owner may also change the name, logo, and colors of a team, and even gets to choose the home stadium.

The owner of a team can opt to manage the team or play on it. Digital diamond barons can play each game in a season, or let the computer simulate the matches. The player must play in each game of a team s/he owns.

At midseason, the computer automatically chooses the athletes with the best midseason stats, who then participate in an All-Star game. This unique feature gives an exciting spin to the product and makes good use of the stats function. There are also tie breakers, league playoffs and a World Championship, a.k.a. the World Series, if this were MLB licensed.

Over 700 MLBPA players appear on 28 different teams. Each team hails from a city where a real team originates, but these teams, of course, have no copyrighted names or logos. There is a special customization feature that allows the player to change the names and logos of the teams, plus the names of the games and venues, so players who've gotta have it can at least call their teams what they want, and christen the World Championship the World Series.

A premium battery back-up not only saves accumulated stats, games, and seasons in progress, it also saves team standings, game highlights, and a list of the 10 league leaders. There are 18 categories for batters and 15 for pitchers.

Highlights is a neat feature that allows the player to assemble a reel of up to 10 big plays. This highlight reel can be saved and watched over and over, whenever the player feels like reliving past glories.

An Instant Replay option allows the player to view any just-completed play. The action can be watched from the pitcher's view or the batter's, and a Close-up Option lets the gamer watch close plays on the bases with a special zoom feature.

The graphics are richly detailed. Smooth, rotoscoped, and extensively easy on the eyes, the pitcher and batter animations are to die for. Instead of looming over the batter, the pov is actually behind him. The perspective is lower to the ground, and the game feels more natural for this unique vantage point.

From the batter view, the outfield looks too narrow, but the view automatically switches to an angled overhead view when the ball leaves the bat, and everything looks fairly normal. Fairly normal, except for the players. The small figures of the ballplayers are jerky and unrealistic, but hey, nobody's perfect and **Hardball '94** is realistic where it counts, in the ever important area—depth of play.

Hardball '94 sounds pretty good. Digitized speech announces the umpire's calls. Crowd noise and an organ that plays all the familiar ballpark tunes gives the game that final bit of being-there feel.

Perhaps **Hardball '94**'s greatest strength lies in its customizability. The player can edit a number of features. With the Edit function, gamers can modify stats, attributes, and logos. Teams can be customized, plus individual players and pitchers. The player choose any of 28 stadia to play in.

The Options Menu lets the player set the level, or complexity of play. The 11 separate toggles control everything from pitcher fatigue to batting stats to fielding. Each is independently toggled, giving **Hardball '94** an almost unprecedented amount of flexibility among 16-Bit baseball games.

It's a buyer's market when it comes to ballgames on cart. There are many good games, each with unique and powerful features, all of them vying for the gamer's dollar. For realistic, in-depth, hands-on baseball with a reliance on stats, **Hardball '94** is a must consideration for any sports gamer's library. **A-** *(John W. Haidin)*

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	**Accolade**
SYSTEM:	**Genesis**
THEME:	**Sports Simulation**
MEGABITS:	**16**
PLAYERS:	**1 or 2**
LEVELS:	**N/A**

STREETS OF RAGE 3™

Go electro! Mr. X's minions meet their match in Dr. Zan's electrifying Robotic Reach!

Lift-off! Use Skate's shreddin' airborne rollerblade spin-attack to Battle the 'Bots!

Axel and Blaze are back and getting their kicks with all new Martial Arts Moves!

It's an all-out turf war featuring MORE weapons, MORE moves and MORE outRAGEous action than ever before. Mr. X has hatched the ultimate evil plot–but what he didn't count on was a bone-crunching counterattack from Blaze, Axel and Skate, together with an all-new character, Dr. Zan...and a surprise helper! It's 24-megabits full of jump kicks, power-slams and spin punches set to thrashing digital sound and plasma-pumping music!

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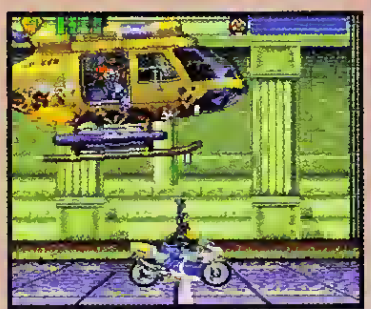
THE FINAL GRADE

The following chart details the thoughts and opinions of several different *EG* editors on some of the latest software. In the future we will feature guest reviewers from around the country.

	Arnie Katz Editor	Marc Camron Senior Editor	Bill Kunkel Executive Editor	Russ Ceccola Associate Editor
Astrix & The Great Rescue	B+	A-	B	B
Bubba 'N' Stix	B-	B	B	B
Castlevania Bloodlines	-	A	B+	A
Champ. W.C. Soccer	A	-	B-	B-
Chester Cheetah	C	C-	D	-
Choplifter 3	B-	B	B	B+
Daffy Duck: Marvin Miss.	B	B+	B+	B
Disney's Aladdin (Gen)	A	A+	A	A
Double Dragon V	C+	C	C+	B+
Eye of the Beholder	B	B	B+	-
Fido Dido	-	B-	-	B
Flashback	A-	B+	A	B-
Flintstones: Treasure...	B	B	B	B-
Goofy's History Tour	B-	A-	B	-
The Jetsons	C+	C	B+	C+
Liberty or Death	B	C+	-	-
Lord of the Rings	A	A-	B	B
Mario Andretti Racing	B+	B	B+	-
Megaman Soccer	A-	A-	B-	B
Mega Turrican	B-	C	A	-
Mutant League Hockey	C	C+	D	B+
NBA Jam	A	A	A+	B+
Obitus	-	B	C+	B
Pele Soccer	B+	-	B	B-
Prince of Persia (Gen)	B	B	A-	A-
Raiden (Jag)	-	B+	A	-
Rocko's Modern Life	B+	B+	B+	-
Romance 3 Kng. III	B	B	A	-
Saturday Night Slm.	B-	B	-	B-
Skitchin'	B+	B-	A	-
Star Trek: TNG (SNES)	B	B	A-	B+
Sub-Terrania	B	B+	B+	B+
Super Pinball: ...the Mask	C-	D	B-	C
Suzuka 8 Hours	B-	B-	C+	-
Tempest 2000	A	A+	A	A
Time Trax	-	B-	C	B
Tommy Moe: Winter Exp.	-	B	B+	-
Turn & Burn: No Fly Zone	-	C+	B-	A-
Wizardry V	B+	B+	B+	B



Fight crime as Darien Lambert in a corrupt city of the future in the exciting Time Trax.

Virtua Racing *(By Sega for Genesis)* An extremely impressive technological accomplishment, the Genesis version of Sega's coin-op hit certainly leaves the best racing games on the SNES choking in its dust. But $100? Save the money and put it toward a 32X and the incredible **Virtua Racing Deluxe**. **A** *(Bill Kunkel)*

A Dinosaur's Tale *(By Hi-Tech for Genesis)* Hi-Tech opted to have both a male and female character for gamers to choose from, and the choice actually makes a difference in the pathway through the game. This unique choice opens up the game to new options. Celina starts off on the rooftops, while Louie begins the game on the docks. The story is magical and charming, but antagonists such as rats and alleycats keep it from becoming too sugary. A beautifully animated, side-scrolling platform game based on the animated film *We're Back!* Plenty of continues without requiring much button dexterity, making it ideal for novice gamers. **B** *(Laurie Yates)*

NBA Action starring David Robinson *(By Sega for Game Gear)* Hit the hardwood for full-court, five-on-five basketball action. Sega obtained all 27 NBA teams,

complete with rosters and real player attributes for maximum realism.

The character sprites are well drawn but extremely small. Worse still, however, is the programmers' difficulty with the game's physics, when the ball is passed, it travels in a straight, horizontal line directly across the entire court. The ball doesn't rise or fall, it simply rockets ahead until a player intercepts it. Needless to say, the passing game not only looks very strange but is pretty tough as well. Attention to detail is what separates the mediocre from the truly outstanding electronic games.

If the Game Gear library doesn't require a basketball cart, gamers are advised to pass. **C-** *(Laurie Yates)*

Mickey's Ultimate Challenge *(By Hi-Tech for Game Gear and Game Boy)* Players can choose either Mickey or Minnie Mouse as their surrogate in this highly replayable puzzle collection. Contests include familiar challenges—versions of Simon, Concentration, and Master Mind—and a letter sorting puzzle, all with variable difficulty levels. Perfect for children and adults, the only serious problem shows up at the harder level of Master Mind, at which point the radical rule changes turn it into a guessing game. Obviously, the Game Gear version is prettier. Game Gear **B+**, Game Boy **B** *(Laurie Yates)*

Side Pocket *(By Data East for Game Gear)* One of the best billiard sims around has finally made the portable scene. Almost all of the treats that made this a popular NES, SNES, and Genesis cart are on hand, including the trick shots, competition, and basic nine-ball. A terrific blend of real pool and video game hyperbole (special target pockets light up for extra points, the cue ball is periodically energized into a Superball, etc.) While the jukebox option from the SNES and Genesis editions didn't make the port, the graphics are very good, doing a nice job of creating a real billiard feel to the game. The music provides a nice backdrop to set and shoot by. **B** *(Laurie Yates)*

Time Trax *(By T*HQ for Genesis)* Genesis owners can now play the role of Capt. Darien Lambert, a Fugitive Retrieval Officer from the TV show *Time Trax*. Hiding out in today's criminal underworld are the most nefarious felons from the 22nd century, and Lambert is on their trail in this rather ordinary platform game. In addition to facing down intelligent enemies, gamers must complete a variety of scenarios and adventures, including a wild water-ski chase in the Hawaiian islands. Not as good as the SNES version. **C+** *(Laurie Yates)*

Troy Aikman Football *(By Williams Entertainment for SNES)* There's nothing especially wrong with this NFL-licensed gridiron sim, but there's nothing especially right about it, either. The graphics are inferior to, but reminiscent of the very popular **Madden Football**, and the play action is just so-so, nothing to write home about. No NFLPA license, so the players are not named. **C+** *(Bill Kunkel)*

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ASTRO CHASE 3-D

Finally, a First-Person Combat Simulator for the Macintosh!

Space combat fight simulators with superb graphics and tons of in-flight options are always welcomed by action gamers. When the program in question is produced for the Macintosh, however, it's cause for jubilation.

This is the kind of intense interactive experience that exhausts the critics' superlatives. Even though it took a little longer to develop than most games, its technology is so advanced that **Astro Chase 3-D** is still the best flying and shooting game ever done for the system and lightyears ahead of any competition.

In truth, there *is* no competition. Most other companies wouldn't even attempt a Mac disk with this kind of audiovisual power, because no one thought it was possible. So **Astro Chase 3-D** isn't just this year's best Mac game to date, it's precisely the type of entertainment product the Macintosh previously lacked.

The documentation presents the backstory, which is also reprised in abbreviated form in the thunderous, volume rich introduction to the game.

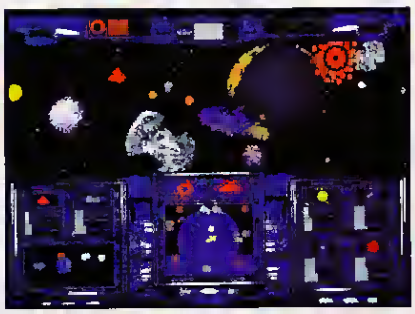
TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	**MacPlay**
DESIGNER:	**Spitalny & Jablon**
SYSTEM:	**Macintosh**
THEME:	**Space Combat**
HD SPACE:	**5.64 Meg**
PLAYERS:	**1**
LEVELS:	**40**

The story line echoes the original plot, but it also incorporates some novel flourishes. The United ConFederation of Planets, a league of more than 1,000 inhabited worlds, has expanded across the galaxy on a tide of cooperation and mutual support. Everything is lovely until the aliens appear and encapsule the entire ConFederation in a force sphere!

The aliens pass through the barrier at will, but the Confederation can't penetrate this wall in space. The UCFP fights a month-long battle near the Pelican Nebula, but computers project a ConFederation defeat long before the actual end. Scientists on Iridon perfect and launch the Ultraship just in time to battle the alien ships that have survived the battle with the dispersed ConFederation fleet.

And there's a new menace. The aliens launch mines which hurtle toward the Earth from every direction. They can destroy our planet, so the Ultraship must disintegrate them as well as defend the civilized universe from the invaders.

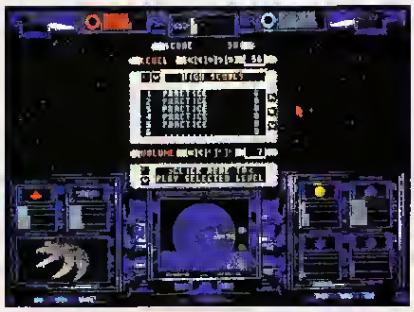


As pilot of the Ultraship, the player uses the mouse, keyboard, mousestick, or Gravis gamepad to guide the craft through 40 progressively harder missions.

The original program's hallmark, the ability to move in one direction and fire in another, is still an important part of the game. The design team of Richard Spitalny and Peter Jahlon, assisted by super programmer Ofer Alon, has adapted the concept first-person perspective very well, and this maneuver must be mastered to have a chance against the multiple menaces. Moving backward while firing forward, for instance, is one of the best tactics against the deadly space mines.

The main display, built around the front view and firing cursor, presents a wide array of information and play options. This is no simple shooter, but logical arrangement of important elements helps the pilot keep track of the constantly developing combat situation.

Across the top of the screen are areas which monitor the amount of energy remaining, the total number of undamaged Ultraships, and the strength of the shields.



Each function is expressed by an icon and a chart. Clicking the icon triggers a digital readout that is a lot more convenient than counting little white squares.

The portion of the screen below the main viewport is even busier. Outputs include a long range video scan of Earth and surrounding space, a counter for the dreaded Mega Mines, a large Radar screen, controls for weapons deployment, the forward/reverse selector, and icons for the warp and inertialess drive.

Astro Chase 3-D debuts the Soltware Accelerated Graphics Engine (SAGE). It manipulates bitmapped images very fast and, reportedly, at little memory cost. Macintosh users have never seen anything like this. The drawings aren't as good as the static screens in **Iron Helix** or **The Myst**, but no Mac game has ever presented such detailed images in such complex speed and tilt of motion.

The interface looks great and, for such an option-laden sim, works well most of the time. The transition from using the mouse to direct the move/fire cursor to using a pointer to select components of the upper or lower command panels isn't seamless.

Astro Chase 3-D is a new beginning for for First Star, and the next step in the progress of entertainment software for the Macintosh. It will remind you why you have a color machine. ■ *(Arnie Katz)*

A STAR IS BORN

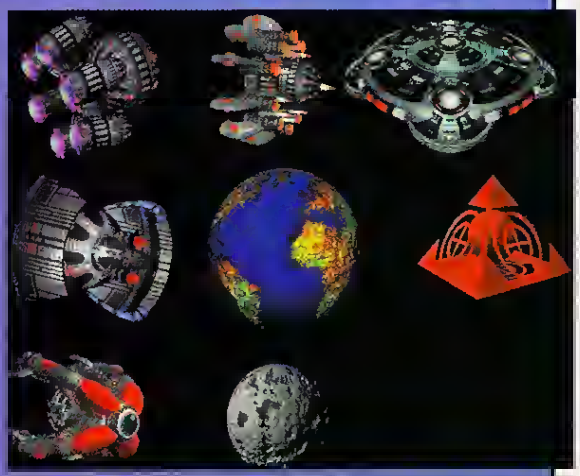
The publication of **Astro Chase 3-D** signals a return to greatness of one of the great software development houses of the early 1980s. It's fitting that Richard Spitalny, First Star president bring his company back to the major leagues with an imaginative updating of the title that contributed so heavily to its initial success.

In the beginning there was Fernando Herrera. Back in 1980, he wanted to do something to make it easier for his child to learn the alphabet. When he decided computers could help, he designed and coded a marvelous little program called **My First Alphabet** for the Atari 800.

When Atari announced a contest for the best software, Fernando entered and won it. Spitalny, an alert entrepreneur with a record business background, got together with Fernando to open the doors of a new company. Spitalny called it First Star Software to reflect Fernando's Atari First Star Award for **My First Alphabet**.

Fernando was far from the only luminary, or even the brightest one, at First Star Software. The flamboyant Jim Nangano and Mike Riedel produced such classics as **Spy vs. Spy**, **Flip 'n' Flop**, and **Boulderdash**.

Both Jim and Mike have gone on to carve outstanding careers in a highly competitive field. Riedel is president of Riedel Software Associates, an active developer of entertainment and educational software, while Nangano's credits include **MicroLeague Baseball 4** and **MicroLeague Football 2** for MLSA Interactive.



Now it appears that Spitalny has found another remarkable programmer, Ofer Alon. Once again, First Star shines like a first magnitude star.

DISCIPLES OF STEEL

Role-playing adventure as it used to be

It is time for the **Disciples of Steel** to rise again, assemble a party of eight adventurers, establish alliances with the free people, raise armies, and vanquish the evil hordes of Variz that threaten the peace and tranquility of Lanathor.

This hoary plot drives the action in a role-playing adventure which, like the early **Wizardry**, **Might and Magic**, and **Ultima** games, was put together by a small team of entrepreneurs and has the rough-hewn look of an uncut diamond. The question remains whether a small, unknown company, without great sums of money or hundreds of programmers, artists, play testers, and designers can make a game good enough to survive in today's market of full-motion video glitz and glamour.

The simple character creation requires selection from a familiar list of eight races, including trolls and ogres, and nine classes or professions. About 10 attributes, including age and hit points, can be rolled up randomly, and, with the 22 skills, complete each character. **Disciples** uses skill-based progression, where skill and attributes increase in exchange for experience points, which are gained in combat, and by completing quests for the nobles of Lanathor.

Each noble rules one of the nine major kingdoms, or one of a number of the kingdom settlements. Each noble's town contains bodyguards, merchants, temples, the Disciples of Steel guild, dwellings, and some dungeons. Quests are usually to obtain some item or provide a service which yields an item.

Save the game before going questing, since there is an annoying feature that dictates if a quest item is not found. There will be no further quests from that noble.

The mouse and keyboard interface provides a complete list of optional party actions. The game's beauty is in the variety of things to do and the non-linear nature of the plot. You can win the game by raising armies to eventually defeat Variz's army in a wargame-like battle, or by finding Variz in his lair and killing him with the original eight companions. Other game options allow the companions to kill Variz's captains to weaken him in the final furious battle.

By completing quests and providing services, the party can be elevated to the position of ruler of the town and its surrounding lands. The party can also achieve control of a town by siege, conquest, or assassination of the ruler. The violent takeovers are the most boring, since no further quests can be obtained from a conquered town.

A TERM PROJECT

Kevin Henderson, who still programs applications for the Johnson Space Center in Clear Lake, Texas, and owns three retail stores which service the NASA mission control facilities nearby, designed **Disciples of Steel** after meeting Martin Kruse, the game's programmer. Kevin says that Martin is a workaholic who fixes reported bugs within 24 hours of receiving them. Both Kevin and Martin wanted to make a role-playing game like the ones that began the genre 10 years ago, with complexity and plot-quest-based games, such as **Pool of Radiance** and the first **Might and Magic**.

Both Martin and Kevin felt that the project, which took three and a half years with eight people was the most fun they ever had. Great games are usually produced by those who create them because they love games.

A CD-ROM conversion and a sequel are in the works as well.

The game interface is mostly top-down, map-like displays, save in the dungeons, where the first-person perspective is used. The pictorial displays are very primitive, Apple II-like graphics that get the job done but do not even come close to most of today's games in quality.

Combat is rounded or phased, tactical, wargame-like combat on a top-down, fully scrolling screen that resembles SSI's old gold box games. Ranged and melee weapons complement a standard arsenal of 60 illusionist, mage, and priest spells. Combat damage and healing of damage is divided into pierce, crush, cut, cleave, and projectile for arms, legs, torso, and head. Each body part has its own type of damage and separate hit point totals.

Henderson and Schrade composed the **Ultima III**-like, 11-voice, fantasy music and digitized sounds which play throughout the game and are themed to different locations.

The fully animated cut scenes of the introduction and conclusion have professional human speech. You can turn the music off but not up and down, and eight save games are too few.

While the graphics are simple and the combat tends to drag on for over an hour in some of the larger battles, the attention to detail, story scripting, over 50 automapped dungeons, phased tactical combat, and non-linear, complex plot with alternate pathways and subplots make this game a guarded buy for those who miss the role-playing games of the past. ◧

(Al Giovetti)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	**FormGen & MegaSoft**
DESIGNER:	**Kevin Henderson**
SYSTEM:	**MS-DOS**
THEME:	**Role-playing Adventure**
HD SPACE:	**8 Meg**
PLAYERS:	**1**
LEVELS:	**N/A**

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PEA SHOOTIN' PETE

Classic arcade shooting action for the PC

In the late '70s and early '80s, most games available for the home systems and present in the arcades were simple shoot-em-ups or other types of action games. They were fun, challenging, and lured players back for more tries. The simplest of these games often took place on a single screen or a succession of such screens. Scrolling backgrounds were a far-off dream. Some popular titles from this era include **Asteroids**, **Space Invaders**, **Astro Fighter**, **Pac-Man**, **Lunar Rescue**, and **Breakout**.

Villa Crespo's Raoul Said recreated the nostalgic feelings of those simpler times with **Pea Shootin' Pete**. The game uses a very basic premise, but stands out because of its colorful graphics, funny sound effects, and addictive game play.

Players should not expect a detailed background story to **Pete**, because there is none. Although the game's 24 levels are arranged into three themed sets, these themes merely set the decor for the sets. The first octet of levels is called the Death Bot Conflict. The eighth level in each set is a climactic battle with a boss enemy. The first boss is the Death Bot itself.

The second set of levels is called The Orion Ordeal. This section's space ship boss is very difficult because it tries to land on top of Pete from time to time. The final collection of levels is called the Search for Evil. The game ends with a confrontation with the heart of evil itself.

Controls are very simple. The keyboard's arrow keys or a joystick move Pete back and forth along the bottom of the game screen. Pete can also jump and duck. The space bar or fire button sends a pea or (if powered-up) a pod upward. There are two types of targets for Pete to hit: bouncing balls and intelligent enemy vehicles. The big balls split into smaller balls and emit a power-up. If Pete jumps before he hits a power up, its benefits double (longer invincibility, more points, etc.). The object of each level is to eliminate all of the balls. Power-ups are random, so each game is different. Players can choose to concentrate more on points or survival. Either way, **Pete** is challenging and nerve-wracking.

The power-ups greatly affect game play. In addition to gems (for points) and bonus lives, players may also capture power-ups that grant invincibility, take them to the next level, eliminate all of the enemies, and increase shot size and speed. In some games, players never seem to get any breaks, while in others, successive warp power-ups may deposit them in the later levels in less than the time it takes to complete one level.

Pete has impressive graphics for such a small-scope game. The backgrounds not only change from level to level, but in fact each scene in one of the game's sections is a little bit farther to the right of the previous scene in the same panoramic view. Some of the backgrounds approach op-art levels of detail. All of them are colorful. The sound effects are hilarious, from the recorded voices going "Awwww" to the boings and beeps. Pete's music repeats after a few minutes, but progresses through a colorful tune over that time.

Each player will approach **Pete** with a different strategy. Some will attempt to finish the levels as quickly as possible. Others may leave just one ball on the screen to avoid as they rack up points on the moving enemy vehicles that appear from time to time. (This strategy confirms the obvious comparisons of **Pete** as a "bouncing" Asteroids.) Level 5 of the Death Bot Conflict is perfect for the latter strategy because the extra targets appear more frequently than some other levels.

The best players will discover that ducking isn't always the best way to avoid balls. Sometimes a perfectly-timed jump is much better. It will take a lot of hard work to reach the game's final level, but those who do will get a special symbol next to their name on the high score chart.

Pete is the perfect type of game to cozy up with after a long session of roaming in a role-playing game or conducting missions in a simulator. Each game takes only a few minutes, but makes up for the short time in the amount of fun players are sure to experience. Pete's price and hard disk space requirements are minimal, so everyone should give Pete a chance to let them return, in a way, back to the early days of video games when those simple games emphasized skill and coordination instead of a multitude of targets and complicated rules or controls. **B+** *(Russ Ceccola)*

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	**Villa Crespo Software**
DESIGNER:	**Raoul Said**
SYSTEM:	**MS-DOS**
THEME:	**Arcade**
HD SPACE:	**1 Meg**
PLAYERS:	**1**
LEVELS:	**24**

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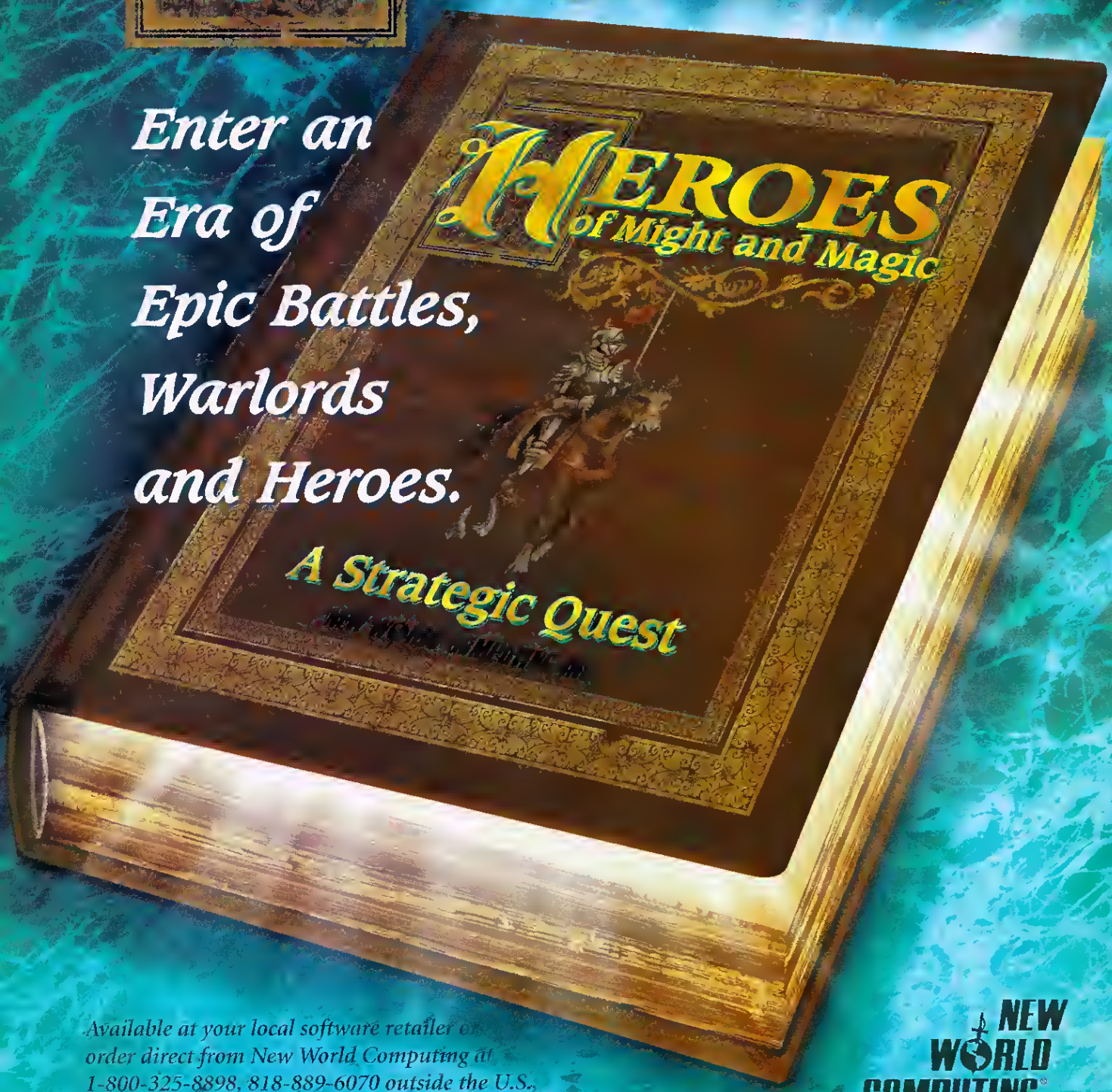

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HIRED GUN

Handling the heroes is the real challenge

Computer gaming has been criticized as being anti-social since most games are designed for one player, two at most. Psygnosis' **Hired Guns** can accommodate up to four—*if* they can all squeeze together tightly enough to huddle around one keyboard. It's an interesting concept that stems from the fact that **Hired Guns** was originally written for the Amiga, a computer with enough input jacks for four.

While it takes four players to get the full benefit of **Hired Guns**, one will do. But regardless of the number of players, four armed-and-dangerous on-screen characters need controlling. Since it's usually tough enough keeping one character in any game out of harm's way, the results here are predictable. Friendly fire can wipe out the entire cast in a flash. Aimless, irrational firing is not always the way to go.

That's one reason this combination RPG/shoot-'em-up is such a challenge, and why **Hired Guns** thoughtfully serves up five different training missions before the bloodletting starts in earnest.

The other reason this is such a challenge is the contortions required to get this finicky program started. **Hired Guns** demands EMS memory, a mouse with a fairly decent mouse driver, no TSRs, and a sunny day to run, and the jury is still out on whether it will accept hard drive compression programs.

Once underway, however, **Hired Guns** has an intriguing story line that appeals to both sci-fi fanatics and manual readers alike—the details of the story and of game play are spread out over four (count 'em, four) separate booklets. So be patient and prepare yourself for a long study session to say the least.

It is the year 2712, and **Hired Guns**' hero is Rorian Deevergh, a mercenary whose Dirty Dozen earn their living by trading their commando skills for payment in rare metals. Their current assignment is on a backwater planet called Graveyard. Illegal genetic experiments have gone awry, and it's up to the commandos to deploy a thermonuclear explosion to eliminate the organisms breeding there.

Before each mission, players tailor their team by selecting four robot, droid, or human toughs, each with specialized skills and resources, and individual physical characteristics. In reality, the characters with the highest physical rating usually come out ahead since they can absorb the most hostile fire before their energy is depleted.

While controlling four characters isn't that unusual for an RPG, having four simultaneous first-person views is. The screen is divided into four quadrants, each showing the point of view of one of the characters. It takes some practice and a good sense of direction to be able to maneuver the team members without them bumping into each other. A special auto-leader feature permits one character to be designated the leader, in theory, the other three will follow, unless they smack into a tree or a wall.

To accommodate four players, one player must use the mouse, while the other three can use various portions of the keyboard. One person can move forward, for example, by using the Q key, while a second would use the UP cursor key, and a third would use the UP key on the keypad. Or a joystick can substitute for one of the keyboard configurations.

Once the game gets rolling, **Hired Guns** resembles the highly popular, action-oriented **Wolfenstein 3-D** in its appearance but not its feel. The once trend-setting and truly original first-person views have become very familiar to fans of **Wollenstein**, **Doom**, **Blake Stone**, and the like. But the character movement is somewhat jerky and cumbersome, the stepped animation primitive, and the graphics blocky and ill-defined. And the music, which begins in a heart-pounding fashion at the game's setup, disappears altogether as the mission begins. Who ever heard of fighting bad guys without mood-altering music?

The name of the game is shoot everything that moves. There's no shortage of weapons to deploy for this task, from hydrogen fluorine band lasers and particle beam rifles to sonic stunners and proximity mines. Ammo clips, anti-toxin syringes, food rations, and psionic amplifiers come in mighty handy when the going gets rough. If that sounds like a lot to keep straight, remember that there isn't just one, but four inventories to keep track of. The mind boggles.

There are 17 missions in all, with skeletons, robots, and genetically challenged bad guys inhabiting them all. Game play quickly becomes feverish and frenzied—and a little frustrating at times, especially in a one-player game. On the occasions when all four characters come under attack, three of them stand by helplessly while only the one being controlled fires back.

Hired Guns works hard to get the blood pumping in most of its areas of game play, but is saddled with a cumbersome control system that distracts more than it contributes to the game's enjoyment. **C+** *(Paul Hyman)*

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	**Psygnosis**
DESIGNER:	**DMA Design**
SYSTEM:	**MS-DOS**
THEME:	**Action/RPG**
HD SPACE:	**6 Meg**
PLAYERS:	**1-4**
LEVELS:	**17**

PACIFIC STRIKE

The fate of the Pacific Theater depends on you!

Gamers confident that their speedy PC can conquer the most demanding code need only to turn to the latest Origin title for a quick lesson in hardware humility. Origin seems to consistently push

processors to the limits, winning reviewers hearts with entertaining and engaging environments while leaving those with older machines to look on with envy and a bit of frustration. **Pacific Strike**, Origin's latest narrative-driven, flight combat sim, is no exception.

The good news is that more and more gamers have the kind of hardware needed to make this exceptional World War II air combat simulation take flight. Origin has sensibly included an extensive list of toggles which let players tone down some of the visual detail to get the simulation running expeditiously. While Origin recommends a 486-50 or above to truly exploit the software, the software will run with reasonable fluidity on a 486-33. Slower platforms are simply not recommended.

Pacific Strike utilizes the flight sim engine created for **Strike Commander**, but the engine seems a bit more responsive in this incarnation. True to the Origin formula found in the **Wing Commander** series and **Strike Commander**, the player is assigned combat missions, flies them, then comes back to the mother ship for updates in the form of a conditionally branching story line. If the player does well, the story is a happy one. If the player fails miserably, the story is likely to be a tale of woe.

This time the world is that of naval air combat in World War II in the Pacific. The player has been recently assigned to a cushy position in Oahu at a sleepy naval shipyard by the name of Pearl Harbor. Within moments of arrival, the player is airborne, protecting defenseless air fields and ships from wave after wave of Japanese aircraft.

From this exciting opening the player is transferred to a carrier group which proceeds to retrace the historically accurate path which the American Navy took in its efforts to recapture the Pacific. Depending upon the player's successes or failures, history is rewritten. More than one mediocre player will find themselves defending Hawaii toward the end of the hard fought war ... a war in which Japan keeps the Pacific!

The handsomely realized textures and shaded polygons of Origin's **Strike** engine create a convincing south Pacific during flight, while a dynamic musical score adds to the flight and combat experiences alike. From within the cockpit players can look in all directions to track the enemy with a view function that pans fluidly (mostly) rather than snapping to predetermined view positions. A track enemy function keeps the player's eyes on the target. Using this mode is one of the best ways to win a dog fight, but players will need to learn the tricky skill of flying intuitively, as the view and the actual trajectory of the plane are dynamically skewed.

Missions consist of taking out specified ground and air targets, and as the game

progresses the player is given a wider selection of planes with which to accomplish the mission. Carrier landings are very authentic, as the player receives "flagged" signals from a deck hand to help correct the approach on the fly, so to speak. Those leery of learning the difficult skill of carrier landings can always resort to an auto pilot landing.

To a certain degree, a flight sim is only as sound as its flight model. Flight in **Pacific Strike** feels very genuine, and Origin has achieved a nice balance between the incredible maneuverability of WWI style biplanes and the wide turning yet screamingly fast jet flight models. Visually represented gray and red outs let players know when they've pushed their digital alter ego to the edge of unconsciousness, while flying into the sun can leave one blind as well.

With the optional speech pack, game play is enhanced with digitized dialog on the part of your squadron fighters as well as the enemy. "Politically correct" players will likely wince at the authentic, if racist, 1940s American slang used to describe the enemy. Rather than being criticized, Origin should be commended for keeping the milieu of the game authentic, but this point will likely be lost on some players.

Pacific Strike is an enjoyable challenge and worthy of any flight combat fan's attention. While some hard-core flight sim fans might complain that Origin's sims lean toward glorified video games, the wonderfully playable products Origin keeps turning out hit their target time and time again. **A-** *(David Gerding)*

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Origin
DESIGNER: Eric Hynan
SYSTEM: PC MS-DOS
THEME: Air Combat
HD SPACE: 22 Meg
PLAYERS: 1
LEVELS: 37

AL-QADIM: THE GENIE'S CURSE

Fierce fighting action in an Arabian Nights world

Al-Qadim: The Genie's Curse introduces both a new game world and a new type of game to fantasy enthusiasts. The **Al-Qadim** AD&D world is set somewhere between the stories of the Arabian Nights and Disney's *Aladdin*. Genies and magic are *de rigueur*. Princesses and sultans roam the city streets of the modest

communities. Miles of sand, oases, and palm trees are common sights.

It is in this environment that **Genie's Curse** takes place. Fans will discover an action adventure that would fit right in among other adventures on video game systems like the Genesis or Super NES, but SSI and Cyberlore Studios instead developed it for the PC market—an experiment that works well!

Genie's Curse starts off in the town of Zaratan, but quickly takes the adventurer to a variety of different locations. The player controls the younger son of Zubin and Jessamin Al-Hazrad.

A corsair by trade, the son returns from sea to discover all kinds of problems in his hometown of Zaratan. He is betrothed to Princess Kara, daughter to the caliph, but the Al-Hazrads' genie has kidnapped her in an act of defiance and wrecked the ships of the Al-Hazrads' rivals, the Wassabs, in order to cast suspicion upon his masters. It is up to the player to guide the son through the many quests and plot lines, with the ultimate goal to save Kara and restore the honor of his family.

The interface is very simple to control, but will be difficult for some players because it requires a great amount of arcade game skill.

The main view is an overhead three-quarters perspective of the area surrounding the player. Although the keyboard and mouse will ably control the character, a joystick with two action buttons is the best controller. Simply move the figure with the joystick or cursor keys or hold down the right mouse button and push the mouse. In all control methods, the main button performs some appropriate action on an adjacent object, person, or monster (use the object, talk to the person, etc.). The second button throws spells or rocks from a sling.

Genie's Curse has a very linear story with

obvious special objects and people, so players should have no problem with the game play because the interface is equally simplistic. The game does have some tricky aspects because of the flexibility of the main character. He can not only use his cutlass against enemies and pick up or use objects, but he can destroy vases, push objects, and sneak stealthily through the screens.

Al Qadim is also demanding because the monsters reduce the health bar to nothing very quickly. Early in the game a mermaid reveals the location of a magical eddy that restores health points, but players will lose health points to get there!

Genie's Curse is a fast-paced action-heavy adventure, so players must be ready to wage battles with creatures as they make the way to the next clue in the game's plot. Even the very beginning of the game is a challenge as the player must navigate a maze full of traps and diversions to prove himself worthy of the rest of the adventure. It will take more than a few tries to survive this maze!

The graphics in **Genie's Curse** are particularly colorful and bright in order to reflect the spirit of the *Arabian Nights* and *Sinbad* films.

The monsters stand out against the detailed backgrounds because of their animation. Unlike many games that present a static image of a monster, players of Genie's Curse will have to dodge or run away quickly from the pirates, giant boars, and mummies if their health bar is too low, because the enemies are relentless.

Catchy music and sufficient sound effects accompany the colorful animation to make a complete experience. CD ROM owners will get special treats in the form of enhanced sounds and music, a lengthier introduction and the ability to play the game entirely off the CD.

Die-hard RPG fans may prefer to avoid **Genie's Curse**, despite the prospect of a new game world to explore, because they will lose patience with the action sequences and reflex challenges. However, there is enough depth in the game to warrant a further look for those people who don't care one way or the other about arcade segments.

Genie's Curse is a magic lamp full of plot twists, battles, and interesting characters, so grab your cutlass and head to the nearest sand dune! Strategic Simulations has built a fantastic trip through a desert kingdom full of might and magic, where princesses are beautiful and adventurers are brave, and the gamer at the controls must be quick and clever. **E** *(Russ Ceccola)*

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	SSI
DESIGNER:	Herb Perez, Cyberlore
SYSTEM:	MS-DOS, PC CD-ROM
THEME:	Action adventure
HD SPACE:	10 Meg
PLAYERS:	1
LEVELS:	N/A

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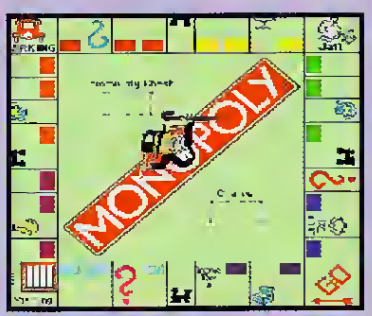
THE FINAL GRADE

The following chart details the thoughts and opinions of several different EG editors on some of the latest software. In the future we will feature guest reviewers from around the country.

	Arnie Katz Editor	Joyce Caruana Senior Editor	Bill Kunkel Executive Editor	Russ Ceccola Associate Editor
Amazing Toons	A-	A	A	A
Arena: Elder Scrolls	B	B	A-	A
Alone in the Dark II	A	A	A+	-
Carriers at War 2	B+	B+	-	-
Com. Adv.: Starship	B-	B-	B	B
Doom	A-	A	A+	A+
Formula One	B-	C	C+	B
Front Page FB Pro	A	A	A	A
Geekwad Games	A+	A-	B+	B
Genghis Kahn II	B	A	A	-
Global Domination	B	B	A	B
Goblins Quest III	B+	B+	B	A+
Heirs to the Throne	C	C	-	C+
Indy Car Racer	A	B+	B+	B+
Innocent Until Caught	-	B-	B-	C+
Isle of the Dead	-	B-	-	A
Lands of Lore	A-	A	B+	A
Leisure Suit Larry 6	-	A-	B	B+
Merchant Prince	A-	A+	-	-
Metal and Lace	C+	D	D	C+
Microsoft Arcade	A	A	A	A
Mortal Kombat	B	B+	C-	B+
Nigel Mansell's	B-	C	C+	-
Ultima VIII: Pagen	A-	B	B+	A-
Police Quest: Open Season	B+	B	B+	A-
Quarter Pole	C+	C	C	-
Ravenloft	B-	A-	C+	B+
Return to Zork	A	A	A-	A
Sam and Max	-	A+	B+	A
Shadow of Yserbius	B-	C	C	A+
SimCity 2000	A	A+	A	A+
Specter VR	B	B+	B-	B+
Star Trek: Judgement Rites	B+	B	B	B+
Super VGA Harrier	B	C+	B	C+
Terminator Rampage	A-	A-	B+	B
TFX: Tactical Fighter	B-	C+	C+	A
The Hand of Fate	B+	C+	B+	A-
Ultimate Domain	B+	B+	B+	B
Unnatural Selection	B+	B+	B+	B



The all-time classic board game Monopoly is now available for fun and challenge on the PC.

Casino Girl *(By VCSI for MS-DOS)* Video Poker has never been livelier, thanks to Julia Parton and a diskload of bare breasted beauties. VCSI has taken a 1991 design for a straight-ahead poker contest and juiced it up with cards decorated with superb color digital photos of semi-nude women. A large window in the upper right corner flashes photos of Julia herself, the world's most photographed nude model, at intervals during play.

Casino Girls would benefit from further graphic enhancements, like replacing the photos of Julia with full-motion video clips. Perhaps such upgrades will be forthcoming in a multimedia edition. As a flop py disk product, it's as good as any other program of its type and offers adults a little visual titillation. **B** (Arnie Katz)

D-Day: The Beginning of the End *(by Impressions for PC)* Just in time for the 50th anniversary, Impressions completed Edward Grabowski's epic wargame version of D-Day, with their usual precision

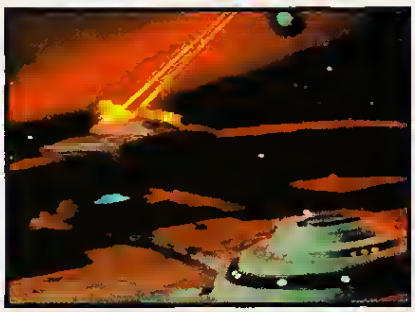
and attention to detail. This is a magnificent simulation. Play Axis or Allied commander and start in the historical positions on June 6 against well-drawn maps. A miniatures scenario even lets the gamer play real-time battles with realistic terrain. There are databanked profiles and portraits of the general, autoplay, and quick play options.

Such detail and historical accuracy often sacrifice simplicity of play. Impressions did a good job of making this complex campaign manageable. The bulky documentation (three separate manuals, for technical, tactical, and strategic operations) are joined by a fourth, *An Overview of Overlord*, the excellent history of the battle and events following, by Jennifer Hawthorne. **A** *(Joyce Worley)*

Free D.I! *(By Cineplay for PC)* Things are about as bad as they can be in this futuristic adventure. All of the remaining humans are in the Human Zoo, guarded and protected by robots. The human protagonist even has his own personal robot companion who helps him with some problems, and acts as a vehicle in others. Conversations proceed by the choice of attitude: angry, friendly, etc. The object is to explore, discuss, investigate, and eventually escape. The sci-fi premise is excellent, and the interface is especially simple, making this good for new adventurers. Graphics are workmanlike, but not state-of-the-art. **B-** *(Joyce Worley)*

Kyrandia *(by MacPlay for Macintosh)* This version of the Westwood Studios hit game is a must-play for Macintosh adventures. Mad Malcolm slew the king and stole the magic gemstone. Only by recovering it can you claim the throne and restore the land of Kyrandia. Magic works in this fantasy kingdom, and there's a surprise waiting around every corner as the game enthusiast tries to solve the challenging puzzles. Stunning graphics make this one of the most attractive adventures available. **A** *(Joyce Worley)*

Monopoly *(by MacPlay for Macintosh)* Virgin's program of the Parker Bros. classic was redone by Interplay for the Macintosh. It's an elegant version with little to criticize even by Monopoly purists. Color and black-and-white versions both crisply reproduce the classic board. The interface is Mac-simple; just click on the dice to start each turn, and prompts lead the player through every decision point. Up to eight human or computer players compete. Gamers can also customize the rules, set time limits, and otherwise tailor the game to suit. This is so good, it's even fun to play alone! **A-** *(Joyce Worley)*



Star Trek Screen Posters *(by Berkeley for Macintosh)* This is the season of the screen saver, there's no limit to the attractive ways to decorate a resting computer. *Star Trek* Screen Posters is one of the best, with 35 beautiful full-screen *ST* illustrations, and *ST* trivia as well. There are more than enough colorful and striking shots to satisfy even the most die-hard *ST* enthusiast. Pictures can be seen either as desktop art or in a continuous slide show. Either way, this screen saver will take your computer where it has never been before. **A** *(Joyce Worley)*

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SIMCITY ENHANCED

It's the same great game in fancy clothes—but they're neat clothes!

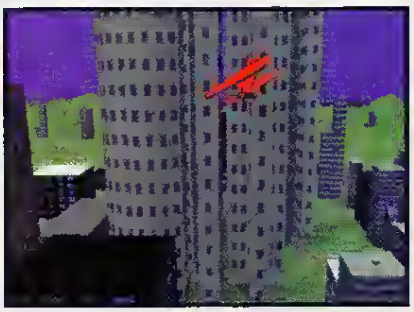
There are very few computer game enthusiasts who haven't played the original **SimCity** at one time or another. Way back in the days when games came on a single floppy, it was the first of its kind, and kept most people awake all night building and rebuilding. A few struggled to reach the elusive and almost mythical Megalopolis status, and fewer still actually made it. Now, **SimCity** returns once more on a single disk (CD that is), this time with improved graphics and over 40 minutes of video clips and digitized sound, designed to draw the player into the game with cinematic glimpses of the inhabitants.

SC-CD is essentially the same game as before with lots of nice touches added, and a few minor disappointments as well. The first concern is hardware requirements. Suggested minimums on the box are a 386SX or better and 2MB of RAM. While this is technically the bare minimum to get the program up and running with most features, those that try to get by at this level will be frustrated by the unreasonable slowness, even with most features and windows deactivated. Some games are still enjoyable at slower speeds, but here even getting the pointer to go where it should requires infinite patience, and the video clips crawl by while the accompanying sound is fragmentized, much like someone with a VCR remote control playing with the pause functions. To be sure, this is not the game's fault, however it is suggested that one should have slightly better hardware than the minimum requirements to enjoy it, and an MPC level one CD ROM drive is a must to make the video function properly.

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	**Interplay**
DESIGNER:	**Brian Fargo**
SYSTEM:	**PC CD-ROM**
THEME:	**Strategy**
HD SPACE:	**2 Meg**
PLAYERS:	**1**
LEVELS:	**N/A**

With that out of the way, players are first treated with an intro of a beautifully animated fractal landscape, flowing into a valley with an entire city sprouting skyward from the ground, and ending with an overhead view of buildings with selectable game options on the rooftops. Within these options are the classic **SC** canned scenarios, three pre-built cities saved to work with, or start from scratch with a



random, unpopulated landscape. Since the game engine itself remains unchanged, it is also possible to import saved cities from the original **SC**.

Once inside any of the games, the improvements become obvious. Higher 640 x 480 resolution in 256 colors, a new window system to re-size and display maps and charts all on one screen, more shortcut key options, and the icing on the cake—animated video clips of realistic city officials and citizens. The game mechanics are the same, but the new touches of reality make building and managing a city seem much more personal.

One of the better enhancements is the digitized sound, which brings the clips to life and offers voice help rather than text messages. Clicking on building icons will not only identify them verbally, but whenever possible the voice is of an appropriate worker in charge of that particular operation. These impart tips and advice

from their perspective as real life laborers in a city environment. Placing a road section on the map, for example, is accompanied by a jackhammer sound clip rather than a simple thud or beep, and occasionally a voice will break in with advice or messages. After a while it may become annoying, but the option to turn it off is always there.

Now for the video clips. In the Maps window, clicking on map icons to the left of the overall view of the city yields extended advice, given by appropriate city managers in conjunction with charts concerning demographics, and potential or current problems. Important events such as disasters are covered by **SC**'s own

news anchorwoman, with real news footage whenever possible. The aforementioned total of 40 minutes is no exaggeration—depending on the player's performance at any given time, each manager has many different clips which offer both praise and criticism, as well as comic relief to break the monotony of wrestling with seemingly infinite city problems.

The result is impressive. Produced and directed by Michael Conti, each clip was filmed with professional actors in real locations to create as much realism as possible. These are not a series of videos taken from various movies and digitized to make pretty pictures, but a set of custom made, informative, and conversational skits that apply directly to the task at hand in the game. What this represents is Hollywood coming to multimedia, and while **SC-CD** isn't quite an interactive movie, it does come close.

On a more amusing note, there are also lots of unrelated short clips that come up occasionally, termed "peeks" in the game. Interplay has called these "a voyeuristic peek into the private lives of the SimCitizens." The intention is to enhance the realism and help the player feel that his or her decisions affect real people, not just numbers and graphs. In a realistic setting, however, one has to wonder why anyone would go to the trouble of filming scenes such as a man shaving or a family playing Twister—or making the effort to show the player (the Mayor) what the citizens do in their spare time. One wonders if some of these were digitized from home videos, hidden cameras, or if extras were hired and filmed specifically to show what a guy making coffee really looks like. No offense to Interplay or Mr. Conti, who have done an outstanding job on **SC-CD**, but the "peek" concept seems a bit silly. Viewing them is optional, but the "You have earned a 'peek view' message that comes up makes one curious as to just how pointless the next one will be.

The only other noticeable drawback to the game is the scrolling (or lack thereof) on the main building map. In the older **SC**, for example, when building roads in a straight line, once you reached the edge of the visible area (not the city limit boundaries) the screen would automatically scroll in the direction you were building. Not so with the CD version, it simply stops at the edge and requires either moving the pointer to the side bars to manipulate the view or manually scrolling with shortcut keys. While this is not a serious problem, it is mildly annoying to those who are familiar with the original game.

Overall the graphic improvements are nice, and the video clips are well done and quite amusing, but this is the same, albeit well-loved, **SimCity** engine dressed up in some slightly trendier clothes. The play, when one comes down to it past the stunning intro and multimedia extras, is precisely that of its predecessor. For those people who are Sim happy, this newest release from Interplay is going to come as a welcome product to the market. Some gamers may wonder if the price of the new CD is worth a few home movies to play with a classic title. **B** *(Ed Dille)*

A MOMENT WITH MURPHY

The city is developing steadily. According to the polls and city officials, taxes seem to be the main concern of the citizens at the moment, but the mayor is still doing well in overall popularity. Traffic is bad but manageable, the mass transit railways are coming along nicely, the new stadium is filling with fans, demand for new commercial areas is high but tax revenues still exceed maintenance costs, even the damage from the earthquake that hit earlier has been mostly repaired. What's wrong with this picture? It's too quiet!

Murphy's Laws apply here, in answer to that thought, a disaster didn't even have to be selected from the menu—one pops up voluntarily to wreak havoc on the city. The monitor goes blank, as a full screen video clip comes in.

SimAction News anchor Carol Davenport appears. As she speaks, she pauses to receive a late-breaking story on the air. A puzzled look crosses her face as she listens to her earphone carefully, then she pulls her clip mike up to whisper, "Is this some kind of joke?" Puzzled, she realizes she's still on the air and turns to the camera, smiling. Apparently there's a monster on the loose, and she's trying desperately to be as professional as possible while informing the hordes of SimCitizens about something she finds hard to believe. Then, to her surprise and eventual horror, the glass of water on her desk begins to shake visibly. She continues to truthfully report the news until the room and camera begin to shake violently. At last, with debris falling on her from above, she decides it would be prudent at this juncture to end the broadcast and "get the hell out."

So ends the clip, and so begins yet another rebuilding process.

REVENGERS OF VENGEANCE

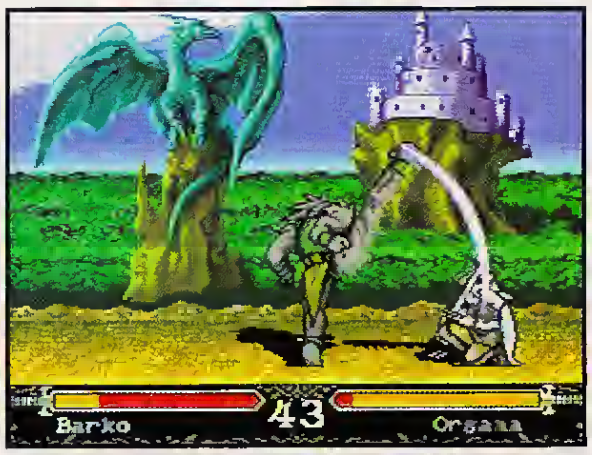
Revenge is a dish best served ... warm?

One of the newest fighting simulations on the silicon streets is **Revengers of Vengeance** by Absolute. **Revengers** is *not* the newest incarnation of the **Street Fighter II** genre, but has an appeal that should reach even the most jaded rumbler.

The game is more whimsical by nature and doesn't take itself as seriously as a number of more hard-core fighting programs do. The story line mostly embraces fighting for justice, not just fighting-for-the-sake-of-fighting. The presence of an RPG-style Quest Mode also boosts this sim out of the standard fighting fare. Each character has a code of honor and a tangible reason for participating.

Revengers is set in the mythical land of the Impossible World. The World holds a number of quasi-human creatures, with well-developed cultures, who live in harmony with each other. However, this idyllic splendor is destroyed when Venum, an incredibly powerful demon, sweeps down with the usual horde of evil minions.

While many of Impossible World's bravest heroes are eliminated, some of the survivors are training and waiting for their opportunity at vengeance.



The gamer has 10 characters available. All have their own strengths, weaknesses, and fighting styles, including magical moves. Each also has a history, and a reason that he or she is seeking revenge against Venum.

There are: Barko, the brave yet vicious leader of the Kancen; Algos, the Dwarf King; Organa, the guardian of the Woods; Talon, the last of a half-bird race; Logan, the last warrior of the city-state of Skye; Psybart, an immensely huge, armor-clad mutated rhino (actually quite gentle by nature); Daktar, a black magic sorceress

(who fought Venum before and won); Fuchida, a well-trained ninjutsu; Magnus, who, like Daktar, met Venum previously, but lost and was mysteriously and permanently altered; and Sara, a member of the Kwan School for martial arts. So there it is; vengeance in more flavors than Baskin-Robbins ice cream.

Gamers can select from three game modes: Tournament, Arena of Death, and the Quest to Destroy Venum. The Tournament Option can be played solo or against another human player. Warrior wannabes select a player-character, and engage in straight out combat. Individual gamers travel a predetermined path and must defeat each challenger, including a twisted, Bizarro-style version of themselves. After defeating those 10, the player-character reaches the Island of Agony for a confrontation with Jado, Venum's main henchman, and then faces Venum himself. The two-player version is a standard fighting scenario.

The Arena of Death allows aficionados to create and save their own custom-made Revenger (up to eight total). Gamers adjust each aspect of the Revenger's fighting style. The computer, not the gamer, controls both of the characters so that they can fight at the top of their ability.

The quest format allows one player to undertake an epic role-playing quest. The p-c challenges the other Revengers to three-round duels, which will earn him or her gold pieces and experience points. The character must also collect items that will be of assistance later in the journey. As with most RPGs, **Revengers** uses skill ratings and experience, life, and hit points to establish progress and rank. The 365 days of game time will be consumed not only by bout time, but also travel time.

Adventurers can earn extra gold pieces and experience points by taking part in quick Guild quests. Skill boosters can also be purchased at general stores, the Emporium of Death, or the Shops of the Magi. The Pub provides a source of information, while the Inn supplies a place of respite. The Gym allows the p-c to fine-tune combat skills and improve various ratings. The Fortune Teller releases information and vital hints, as well as increasing the character's experience level—all for a price, of course.

The graphics are solid. The presentation is a standard street-fighting setup, but the backgrounds are eye-catching without being distracting. The character animations are very good, especially Barko's claw slashes. The appearance of blood may disturb some viewers, but it is not an outrageous display. Regrettably, Absolute was unable, or unwilling, to break the phoniness of the death scene: the defeated party "float" through the air and lands on their backs in standard fight game fashion.

The musical score is varied and interesting without being intrusive. The sound effects are amusing, especially Daktar's giggle of delight when she is victorious.

The game play is standard fare, with the requisite magical moves. Interestingly, there are four female characters, which shows Absolute is perhaps attempting to broaden its demographics. Ease of moves, as well as the three difficulty settings, should hook even novice players, yet prove challenging to the most advanced.

Revengers of Vengeance is a welcome, and much needed, addition to the Sega CD library. A fighting simulation with an RPG segment provides enough genre-crossover to maintain a longer interest level than most of the fighting games on the market today. **B** (*Laurie Yates*)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	**Absolute**
DESIGNER:	**Micronet**
SYSTEM:	**Sega CD**
THEME:	**Fighting/RPG**
HD SPACE:	**N/A**
PLAYERS:	**1-2**
LEVELS:	**N/A**

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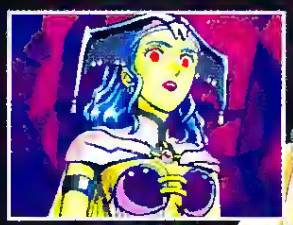

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WHO SHOT JOHNNY ROCK?

A dynamic collection of bullets, babes, and bad guys

TECH SPECS	
PUBLISHER:	American Laser Games
DESIGNER:	American Laser Games
SYSTEM:	PC CD-ROM
THEME:	Arcade Action
HD SPACE:	1 Meg
PLAYERS:	1
LEVELS:	N/A

American Laser Games (ALG) established a new generation of shooting games in arcades with **Mad Dog McCree**. Now "gun games" are all over the place, with titles like **Alien 3: The Gun**, **T2**, **Lethal Enforcers**, and other American Laser Games productions visible in arcades, pizza joints, and other locations. It was a natural move for ALG to port their line of games over to home formats now that there are a few different CD-based systems that can store and play the video scenes.

Who Shot Johnny Rock? was the second ALG game to hit arcades, following on the heels of **Mad Dog McCree**. Now PC CD-ROM owners can experience all of the action, explosions, and colorful characters of **Johnny Rock** and, if they're lucky, discover an answer to the titular question.

Unlike **Mad Dog McCree**, **Johnny Rock** has a random nature that makes it completely replayable even after someone finishes the game and solves the mystery. The goal is to discover the culprit who killed a popular lounge singer outside a telephone booth. The player does this when he survives the gunfire in one of four key game locations (pool hall, casino, warehouse, and garage) and obtains a clue (picture of a work of art) to the combination of a safe from the location's proprietor. Each scene has its own unique elements, so **Johnny Rock** is as visually stimulating as it is physically challenging. Once the player sees all the clues to the combination, a trip to the house of the heartthrob will reveal the identity of the killer.

At the house, players must shoot the works of art in a room in order to get the combination to open the safe and see a final object related to one of the four suspects. For example, if the player opens the safe and sees a stick of dynamite, the suspect is Mumps in the warehouse. A final visit to the suspect's location and survival of another scene completes the game with the suspect's confession.

The game play in Johnny Rock is very simple. Just aim the machine gun cursor at the screen and shoot the criminals that pop up from time to time before they manage to squeeze off a shot themselves. Players have to be careful with their shots because innocent victims appear as well as the gun-wielding hoodlums. The game is forgiving and allows a few trips to the morgue after a hood's successful shot, but after too many "deaths" the game is over. ALG fortunately provides a single save game, so players can make it through the game in a matter of a half hour if they save after every successful shot, or play fair and only save after each scene or set of scenes in a location. A real expert can make it through the game without any saves. Difficulty levels affect the number of lives and criminals. There should be enough ammunition for the machine gun to make it through an entire game, but if more is necessary players can use the game dollars they earned from successful shooting to buy bullets at the ammo shop.

The video scenes in **Johnny Rock** are quite exciting. In the course of the player's visits to the game's locations via a city map, there will be exploding cars and oil drums, stairway shootouts, snipers, and room-clearing gunfights. All of the scenes are first-person perspectives from the eyes of the player/private detective hired to solve the case. The video is choppy on single-speed CD drives, but double-speed drive owners will see a much clearer game.

The characters in **Johnny Rock** are quite a collection, from the sexy Red to the greaseball called Smallpox. It's fun to see the suspects sweat and the endless parade of criminals keel over dead. The excellent CD sound reproduction of the original music and sound effects, including the rat-a-tat-tat of gunfire, emphasizes the action on the screen.

Johnny Rock is more fun than most shooting games because players don't have to reload the gun after six shots. Instead, they can concentrate on their reaction to the slight on-screen movements of the targets right before they fire. The clues to the safe's combination and the randomness of the game play ensure that players can enjoy this challenge to their reflexes many times. Keep an eye on that dynamite, and never fire until the criminal pulls out his gun! **B** *(Russ Ceccola)*

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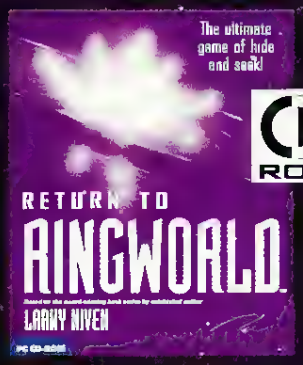

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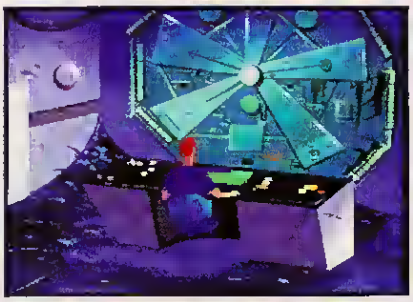
OUT OF THIS WORLD

If at first you don't succeed, die, die again

Out of This World (**OOTW**) is the story of Lester Knight Chaykin, a fast drivin', rock 'n' roll listenin', maverick particle physicist. One stormy night, just as he is about to unravel the final mysteries of the universe, Lester is blown out of this world through time and space when lightning strikes his atom smasher. Lester finds himself on a strange, dangerous planet. It will take all of his and the player's brains to stay alive.



OOTW is a multidirectional scrolling, action/puzzle game. Superficially, the play resembles **Prince of Persia**. Lester walks or runs through assorted dangerous situations, and by pressing the B button, he can jump across pits and obstacles. Lester can also kick, pick up, and use a gun, plus duck. Some scenes have him crawling through tunnels, driving tanks, and swinging from vines.

Early in the game, Lester acquires a raygun. This life-saver not only shoots bad guys, it generates shields and superblasts which demolish doors and walls with a single shot. While some encounters rely on Lester's shooting skills, more often the gun is needed for opening doors and erecting shields.

The puzzles are fiendish. There's one beauty that involves blasting a wall and unleashing a torrent of water. The player must run a step ahead of the raging water, jump three spike-filled pits, and clear a fourth pit before being catapulted into the air by the water as it hits the underside of the platform Lester is standing on.

The timing is merciless and players may have to go back to this puzzle again and again before they get it right. This is one of many puzzles that players will have to assail over and over, but that's the nature of the game. If the puzzles can be solved the first or second time out, it's not much of a puzzle game is it?

Lester dies any number of unpleasant ways, from spike-filled pits to disintegrating ray blasts. He can drown, be electrocuted, be beaten, eaten, and have his blood drained. Fortunately there are limitless continues, plus passcodes that let the player come back to a game in progress.

The manual is slim but provides plenty of information for the player, including

some hints that give away parts of the first scene. This is done out of pity for the novice player who might have a rough time solving the first few puzzles in the game. At the back of the manual there are helpful hints that apply to the whole of the game, but after that, players are on their own unless they want to call the 75-cents-a-minute Interplay hintline.

Where **OOTW** shines brightest is perhaps in the sound department. The sound effects are very good, and composer Andrew Dimitroff's music is fantastic. The different scenes have different music, which also varies according to the on-screen action. It's a subtle and effective mood setter throughout the game. There's no way to turn it off, but why would anyone want to?

OOTW looks like no other game. The mix of shaded polygons and stylish hand-drawn backgrounds gives the game a fresh, comic book feel. The graphics are not stunning in their complexity but more for their simplicity. A beast that threatens Lester early in the game is very menacing, although it is only a black silhouette with no features save two red eyes and dripping fangs. When a character is shot with one of the lethal rayguns, the effect is horrific, and spectacular. The victim is immediately reduced to a glowing, incandescent skeleton which then explodes in a small shower of debris.

The cut scenes, done wholly with polygons, are probably the weakest point in the graphics, but they are still very effective for setting the atmosphere and moving the story along. All of the character animations are smooth and fluid, especially Lester's, which resemble the rotoscoped characters in **Prince of Persia**.

Out of This World is not perfect. Some of the puzzles have to be attempted so many times they'll have players beating Lester's head against the wall in frustration. Most of the puzzles require Lester to die numerous times before they are solved. Admittedly, this is not too much of a sticking point when unlimited continues are given as they are here. Also, there is no way to skip the cut scenes, no matter how many times the player might have seen them.

These little problems don't detract too much from the overall product. **OOTW** delivers hours of solid game play and if there were more games like **Out of This World** for the 3DO, there would be less doubt about the 3DO's future. **A**

(John Wesley Hardin)

BONUS GAME

By entering BRGR at the passcode screen, **OOTW** players can access the perfect antidote to puzzle burnout. **Stalactites** is a hidden game, completely separate from **Out of This World**. Originally designed by Kurt Dekker as shareware for the IBM-PC, **Stalactites** has gone through incarnations on several other platforms.

Bill Heineman, programmer and scriptor on **OOTW**, was playing around one day and found that the source code for **Stalactites** could be compiled for the 3DO. It became an impromptu collaborative effort when other people volunteered to work on it. Programmed on the 3DO by Bill Heineman, with original Art by Lars Brubeck and original music by Brian Luzietti, **Stalactites** is an elegantly simple, murderously fast race to kill invaders in a **Tempest**-style variation.

There's not really a cap on the levels, it just keeps on getting faster and faster. At about the 20th level it just becomes physically impossible to play," says Bill, who won the American Space Invaders Championship in 1980.

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	**Interplay**
DESIGNER:	**Eric Chahi**
SYSTEM:	**3DO**
THEME:	**Puzzle/Adventure**
HD SPACE:	**N/A**
PLAYERS:	**1**
LEVELS:	**N/A**

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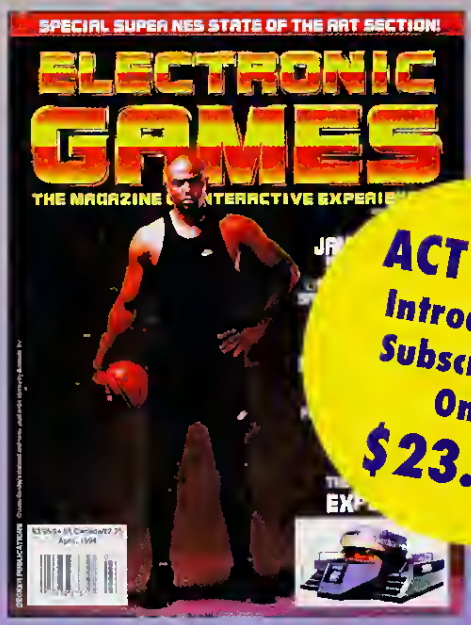

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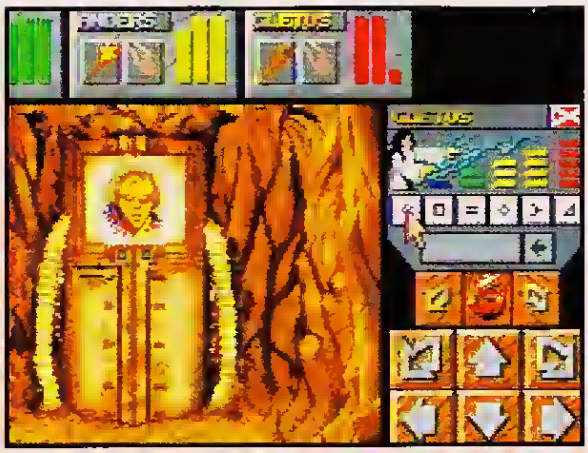
DUNGEON MASTER II: SKULLKEEP

Dungeon crawling for fun and profit

Torham Zed is a young and ambitious soldier. Sent to a remote post by his mysterious Uncle Mylius, Torham learns of a machine called the ZO Link that allows travel to other places of existence. It was prophesied that one day, someone would find the four keys that unlock the forbidding fortress of Skullkeep, and that same someone would either save the world or



destroy it. To reach the ZO Link, Torham must first gain entrance to Skullkeep.

In this first-person, 3-D RPG, players take the role of Torham as he leads a party into Skullkeep and on to other dimensions. Torham must wake three other champions from cryogenic sleep to take with him. There are 16 different characters to choose from. By walking up to a chamber, the player sees through the window to look at the person inside. Touching the glass takes the player to a screen showing the name and abilities of that character. Clicking on the large handle on the right side of the screen opens the chamber, and that character joins the party.

Getting into the keep is a quest in itself. Not only must players gird themselves for battle, they have to pick the premises clean before they get started. Taking torches off the walls, stealing coins out of fountains, eating dead bats . . . well, they don't need to eat the bats, but they can if they have to.

The press materials that accompany **Dungeon Master II** say that it is suitable for beginners and experienced RPGers alike. That, alas, is not the case. The interface is formidable, if mostly intuitive. Each character has a box at the top of the screen displaying his/her name, and a graph of vital statistics like health and stamina. Below that are boxes showing what the character has in each hand. Clicking on the name takes the player to a screen where the inventory and status of a character can be examined closely.

Magic is summoned by using a chant. Chants are composed of an arrangement of letters called symbols. The player chooses a series of symbols, each of which is a component of a spell. It takes two to four symbols to make a chant. When the symbols are in the desired appropriate order, clicking on them produces the magical effects.

This magic system is difficult and counter-intuitive. Without a careful reading of the docs, players are apt to find themselves floundering around, wasting the character's magic points.

Object manipulation and inventory are entirely easier to use. A box on the right side of the main screen shows the characters and what each is holding. By clicking on these boxes, players can move objects from one champion's inventory to the other. To use an item, place it in the character's hand and click on it. If it's a pouch, a bag, or a chest, it will open and the contents will be displayed as icons, which can be taken out and moved around like any other object. To use a weapon, simply click on it and a list showing the different attack types for that weapon will appear. Click on the attack type and the character will make the attack.

The inventory screen allows for closer examination of the character. On the left side of the screen is an outline of a person. By clicking on a part of the outline the character can perform various actions. Clicking on the feet will put on or take off the footwear the character owns. To put on a helm, simply click on it from any inventory screen, then drag it to a character's head. The helm will now be placed on the character's head.

If everything about Skullkeep was as elegant and simple as the inventory system, JVC would have a surefire hit on their hands. If is the key word here.

Movement around the Skullkeep universe is slow and painful. Slow because of the CD access time, and painful because the party is forever walking into walls. The Genesis controller is a far cry from a mouse, which is what this icon-driven, point-and-click interface really needs.

After a time, the party will become less accident prone as the player learns to control things, but the movement still feels bulky and imprecise.

Combat is a little difficult, even with the easy weapon use. Characters can be attacked from the side, and the character may be turned to face an opponent in any direction. However, since the perspective is always first-person, the player often ends up running two or even three different battles, only one of which can be seen at any one time. This is a little tricky. Not impossible, but not for beginners.

The graphics are colorful enough and all the monsters scary looking, but that's it, and for some of today's CD sophisticates, that may not be enough. The sound effects are better, and ambient noise lends the proceedings an air of realism. There is some nice music that plays throughout the game, and it seems completely unrelated to anything happening on-screen.

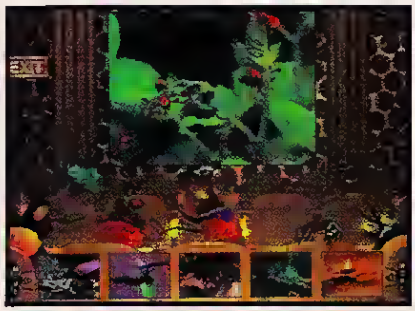
Still, there is a very big game world to explore here, and an interesting premise in interdimensional travel. While it may overwhelm the neophyte, veteran dungeon crawlers will probably find **Skullkeep** worth the challenge. **E+**

(John Wesley Harding)

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER:	JVC
DESIGNER:	FTL
SYSTEM:	SEGA CD
THEME:	RPG
HD SPACE:	N/A
PLAYERS:	1
LEVELS:	N/A

Bug Adventure *(by Knowledge Adventure for PC CD-ROM)* Creepy crawlies are explored with encyclopaedic detail in 3-D views (glasses provided!), simple games, movies, and data banked information that's accompanied by stunning graphics and intelligent commentary



The user points and clicks a path through the 3-D Bug Basement, Find It game, Honeycomb Theatre, Who Am I, and the talking storybook. Not for the squeamish, it presents a fascinating body of information, accompanied by an outstanding musical soundtrack, plus clips of insect sounds, that makes the user aware of the small workers in our world. It's for anyone, from non-readers through adult, who wants to learn a little more about Earth's largest population **A** *(Joyce Worley)*

Forever Growing Garden *(by Media Vision for Windows and Macintosh CD ROM)* This is one of the prettiest programs available for children, so charming that it will entice parents as well. The user chooses from three gardens (flower, vegetable, or castle grounds), then goes to the hardware store to buy seeds. Using click-and-drag, drop the seeds into the hole (no messy digging required!), water the plants, and they start growing. A calendar is the timer, so growing time can be speeded or slowed. Then harvest. Cut flowers go to the flower shop for arranging, vegetables go to the market, hedges get trimmed. There's also a catch-the-gopher game. This is a beautiful electronic toy that will teach your child the beauty and function of plants in nature **A** *(Joyce Worley)*

Seaworthy *(by Digital Illusions for PC CD-ROM)* This repackaging of two classics puts **Sub Battle Simulator** and **PT Boat** on one CD-ROM. As older games (**PT Boat Simulator** is copyrighted 1987), they don't have the stunning graphics of more modern simulations, but they still offer a lot of play action for World War II commanders. **Sub Battle Simulator** won its stripes for completeness and realism. The user can skipper any of three U.S. subs, or one of three German U-Boats, through 60 Atlantic and Pacific missions. A heads-up display surrounds a porthole viewscreen with gauges and dials, as well as command features. **PT Boat** puts the gamer at the helm of the large PT Torpedo Boat, through five levels of play, and 45 historical missions spread over the Pacific and Mediterranean Seas. **B+** *(Joyce Worley)*

Dragon's Lair *(by ReadySoft for 3DO)* Since Don Bluth's creations hit the arcades in 1983, **Dragon's Lair** attained almost mythic proportions. Although there were various versions of the hit for different gaming formats, it took the arrival of multimedia to really bring it home. This 3DO version is stunning, probably the best of any version on any system, and the play action is just what you'd expect. In fact, this certainly matches, and probably exceeds the original. As always, the gamer's task is to help Dirk the Daring rescue the princess and defeat the dragon, through an enchanted castle filled with dreadful obstacles, pitfalls, and monsters. This is a top-level rendition of an old song, and everyone who loved the original will enjoy this. But, face it, this never was the best game available. It won its kudos for beautiful graphics, and that's the driving force behind this modern version as well. **B+** *(Joyce Worley)*

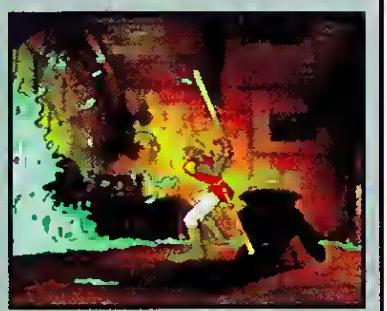
The Horde *(by Crystal Dynamics for 3DO)* An unlikely hero saves the king and receives a knighthood in return, as well as the king's own mighty sword. He has many obstacles to overcome in his quest to fulfill his duties as a knight. He has to build villages, cultivate the many fields that surround the villages, plant the crops, raise strong fences and walls, and buy livestock. The real challenge is to defend

the tracts, crops, livestock, and villages from the Hordlings, ravenous invaders who eat everything in their paths. He's got archers and knights, as well as his own sword, but the relentless invaders just keep coming back for more. He's got lots of nifty tools in addition to the sword: a flamethrower, ring of teleportation, bombs, and a flute that serenades the Hordes. **B** *(Joyce Worley)*

THE FINAL GRADE

The following chart details the thoughts and opinions of several different EG editors on some of the latest software. In the future we will feature guest reviewers from around the country.

	Arnie Katz Editor	Marc Camron Senior Editor	Bill Kunkel Executive Editor	Russ Ceccola Associate Editor
Aegis Guardian/Fleet	A	B+	A+	-
Bill Walsh College Football	A	A-	B	B-
Castles: Siege/Con.	A	A	A-	C+
Commanche CD	A-	A-	A	A
Crash 'N' Burn	D	F	B-	C+
Critical Path	B-	B-	D	-
Day of the Tentacle	A-	A	A+	A+
Dennis Miller (3DO)	D	F	D	D
Dracula Unleashed	A	A-	A	B+
Dragon's Lair (CDI)	B	B	B	D+
Dune	B+	B+	A-	B+
Escape ... Monster M.	A-	B	C	B+
Heimdall	B	B	B+	-
The Horde 3DO	B-	C+	B	-
Incredible Machine (3DO)	A	A	A	B+
John Madden (3DO)	A	A	B+	B-
Jurassic Park (3DO)	B	B	B	B+
Kether	A-	A-	C+	-
Lethal Enforcers	A	A-	B+	B+
Lunar: Silver Star	B	B+	-	B
Mad Dog McCree (PC)	B	B-	B	B-
Man Enough	D	D	F	C+
Metal Masters	-	C	C	-
Microcosm	B+	B	B-	A-
Myst	B+	B+	A+	A+
Night Trap (3DO)	B+	B	B	C+
Prize Fighter	A	B	B	B-
Return to Zork	B+	A	A	A+
Rise of the Dragon	-	B	B+	B+
7th Guest (PC)	A-	A-	A	B-
Sonic CD	A	B+	A	-
Star Trek 25th An. Ed.	B+	A	B+	A+
Stellar 7: Draxon's Revenge	A-	B	A	A
Super Wing Cmdr. (3D)	A-	B+	B+	B
Tomcat Alley	B	B	A	-
Tony LaRussa B. Ball	A	A	B+	A-
Total Eclipse	B+	B	B	-
Voyeur	B	B+	B	B+
World of Xeen	B-	A+	C-	A



From the depths of the arcade, Dragons Lair blazes its way to the 3DO system in full glory.

GUS GOES TO CYBERTOWN

Dog Days In a Hometown Setting

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Modern Media Ventures
DESIGNERS: Pat Lewis, Raul Viceral
SYSTEM: PC-CD
THEME: Edutainment
HD SPACE: 4 Meg
PLAYERS: 1

Gus Goes to Cybertown contains a variety of locations to visit and explore, each with a game or activity. Three skill levels provide different lessons that keep the program playable for several years of the child's development.

The graphics are, of course, colorful and clean-lined, in the best storybook tradition. Gus, a large and friendly hound dog, can visit the market, toy store, pet shop, laundry, and the park. These locations are further divided into special game areas, to provide a total of 11 environments.

Games include shopping to fill a list of items, books that open to show quicktime movies, a sing-along jukebox with three tunes, a jigsaw puzzle, alphabet recognition and spelling, counting and addition games, and an interesting challenge to dress Gus appropriately for the weather. There's also a time line that takes Gus to 11 different historical eras. Clickable items are everywhere, producing clever and whimsical animations. And, to provide an even richer play experience, overlaying these explorations is the CyberBud game. Children must search every environment to spot 15 hidden CyberBuds.

This top-drawer program requires top-level equipment. It's very picky about the sound and graphic drivers. The start-up instructions were inexact in the copy I received, but the manufacturer promised this would be corrected in the shipped version.

With its technical requirements fine tuned and taken care of, once on-screen there will be few children who will be able to resist the character and charm of this educational game. ■ *(Joyce Worley)*

BIG ANTHONY'S MIXED-UP MAGIC

Tricks and Slight of Hand Provide the Fun

TECH SPECS

PUBLISHER: Putnam New Media
DESIGNER: Magnum Design
SYSTEM: PC-CD
THEME: Edutainment
HD SPACE: 2.5 Meg
PLAYERS: 1

Big Anthony's Mixed-Up Magic is for slightly older children, ages 5-10. The education in this charmer is deeply buried under enchantment, since Big Anthony moves through his world doing magic tricks. Point-and-clicks reveal Rube Goldberg-style animations, and the sequences are amusing and clever to watch and rewatch.

This, too, is a big game requiring lots of memory, but the payoff is terrific. There are nine separate activities. The cupboard matching game puts together eight pairs of items. The mixed-up zoo creates funny animals to paint, then makes them dance to a jungle beat. The magic trick game is a sure pleaser, as Big Anthony does some slight of hand in six different tricks. The music maker stars a five-creature band and four songs that the child can join in a jam session.

The adventure game sends Big Anthony through the entire game to find things, meet the inhabitants, and complete tasks. There are several embedded find-it games and varied activities, or the child can just explore Big Anthony's country and read the story (or hear it read aloud.)

Movement through the game world is intuitive: click on a door to exit or enter, click on a location to move there. Short cut options let the child move directly to any game, activity, or to a different part of the adventure. Big Anthony provides some hints, but if the child is still unsure what to do, an on-screen dove has all the answers.

Humor overlays the entire production. Big Anthony is a bumbling kind of hero who constantly gets in trouble; his on-screen bosses assign tasks to him, but his silly ways produce unexpected results.

The adventure is based on Tomie dePaola's book, *Strega Nona Meets Her Match*. As an extra bonus, the book is included in the package.

Considering the number of children's programs now on the market, and the additional ones scheduled to appear before year's end, no one should settle for less than top product. **Big Anthony's Mixed-Up Magic** fills the bill, with outstanding fun for kids. ■ *(Joyce Worley)*

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HEGH7

INTERNET YELLOW PAGES

Christine Maxwell & Czeslaw Jan Grycz, New Riders Publishing, 896 pages (softbound, $29.95)

The initial impression is certainly that of a typical telephone company business directory for a small city. It's printed in black and red ink on canary paper and bulks 1¾ inches deep. Its remaining dimensions (8 in. x 10 in.) are a bit smaller than the standard telephone book. On opening it, however, the expected name-and-number listings are missing, and it looks as though there's nothing present there but display ads.

These *are* the listings, of course, many of them boxed with red headlines, and interspersed among them are category keywords in red, like BONSAI, INTERNATIONAL LAW, OLD TESTAMENT, or SPACE SCIENCE. The book is organized alphabetically by category, with dictionary-like alphabet tabs printed along the edge for quick reference. There is also a listing of them in the back, along with a list of Internet service providers worldwide. Four and a half pages of U.S. providers are conveniently grouped by area code.

In addition to a contents listing and acknowledgements, the initial pages provide an introduction to the Internet and to the book itself. The first 18 numbered pages show how the more than 10,000 entries themselves are organized. Each usually has its own list of keywords for cross-reference in the directory. Listings are also ranked as Standard, Major, or Turbo, depending on the levels and depth of information that may be available from or through them; these ranks are signified by their presentation—with or without boxes—and how elaborate the box is.

Newcomers to Internet will find the explanations of how to use it informative, especially those who find the long addresses intimidating. The guide uses a recently developed standard for the address, or Uniform Resource Locator.

Anyone using Internet or planning to will find a wealth of information in this book and may well find it invaluable in journeying on the Information Highway. *(Ross Chamberlain)*

FLIGHTS OF 13 MIKE

Fred J. Calfior & Douglas W. Miller, CalMil Publishing, 276 pages (Softbound, $19.95)Fred J. Calfior & Douglas W. Miller, CalMil Publishing, 276 pages (Softbound, $19.95)

Most Microsoft Flight Simulator users have already mastered the scenarios, admired the scenery, and find even flips and barrel rolls somewhat boring. *Flights of "13MIKE"* is the first book in a new series for those who want more out of this venerable flight simulation without having to purchase additional software. Incredibly, the book uses the existing basic scenarios in MFS 4.0 and 5.0 to teach stringent FAA flying techniques in a way that will keep players and those with actual flight time coming back for more.

Flights of "13MIKE" concentrates on an aspect of the simulation that the authors felt was noticeably absent—planned cross-country flights from one airport to another. The emphasis is to indoctrinate the player in the mechanics behind the magic that keeps airways free of bothersome mid-air collisions. Real flying techniques are not enough; precision execution of a flight path is the key to success in commercial air. Other titles have given players a perspective on air traffic control, but never on the receiving end with the degree of accuracy offered by *Flights of "13MIKE."* Executing these scenarios will provide invaluable skills readily usable in actual flight.

Each of the 12 scenarios contains a detailed flight plan, FAA procedures, and helpful commentary from the flight instructors. Best of all, a scoring system is included that involves pausing the game at intervals to answer questions and record instrument readings, which are checked for accuracy at the end of the flight for points. Overall performance is then ranked from "Top Gun" to "Take the Bus." This system is designed for precision flying with emphasis on standard procedure instead of sightseeing. While this may sound tedious, it keeps the pilot acutely aware that real life flying is not only exhilarating but potentially deadly if a Cessna meets with a solid object. It also promotes familiarity with instrument flying, which will be the focus of the next two books in the series available this year.

Because familiarity with **Microsoft Flight Simulator** is assumed, only vital information from the MFS manual is repeated, usually just for quick reference and to point out 4.0 and 5.0 command differences. It also contains a wealth of tips not fully explained in the manual—for example, when to lower the landing gear rather than how. Much more than a hint book or manual supplement, *Flights of "13MIKE"* is like having a personal flight instructor at your side while you fly into the wild blue yonder. *(Ed Dille)*

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THE VECTREX: AN '80s HOME ARCADE

by JOE SANTULLI

"... 100 percent playable, the Vectrex also capitalized on what looked to be the wave of the future: vector-based video games."

To most video gamers, there is nothing worse than having to shut down your console so that someone else can use the TV. Even less predictably, world events occasionally force us to switch off a game to keep abreast of the latest developments (*CNN* is a prime offender). While we all experience these nagging setbacks in gaming, GCE decided to do something about it when they released the Vectrex in 1982. Portable, programmable, and 100 percent playable, the Vectrex also capitalized on what looked to be the wave of the future: vector-based video games. The innovative console is completely independent of the family TV, and can easily be moved from room to room. Its 9" monitor is perfect for any tabletop—in fact, the system looks like a miniature arcade machine! GCE hoped to capture a piece of the success that games like **Asteroids**, **Star Castle**, and **Tempest** received in the arcades. Aesthetically sleek and technologically impressive, the Vectrex stood poised to take the industry by storm that Christmas season.

It might have, if it weren't for its steep price. The expensive ($249.99 when released) unit was released about the same time the ColecoVision (another "advanced" system) was making its debut. Older but more software-rich systems like the Intellivision and Atari VCS were available at half the price, making the Vectrex a system for consumers with bucks to burn. A year later, the video game industry was falling apart, and the Vectrex was just another victim.

In recent years it has become increasingly difficult to find the consoles, but the enterprising collector will prevail. The cartridges are a little easier to come by, with a few rare titles whose find will challenge even the most determined hobbyist. One important thing to remember is that each cartridge should be accompanied by a plastic screen overlay. The overlay is crucial because it adds color to the otherwise white on black graphics and also includes control functions (making the manual less important). Without further ado, here is a quick breakdown of the Vectrex library.

By far the easiest titles to find are those that were released in tandem with the console. **Berzerk**, **Armor Attack**, **Blitz!**, **Scramble**, and **Space Wars** are all coin-op translations. **Clean Sweep** is the token maze game of the catalog, **Hyperchase** the racing game. The Vectrex shines in outer space shoot-'em-ups, and GCE obliged with **Cosmic Chasm**, **Rip-Off**, **Solar Quest**, and **Star Trek: The Motion Picture**. If you're just getting into this system, start out by trying **Armor Attack**, **Scramble**, **Hyperchase**, or **Cosmic Chasm** to see if this system is for you. Undoubtedly, the person selling has one of these games to go along with it.

As the programmers gained experience with the vector system, the games became more sophisticated.

• ARMOR ATTACK

Considered uncommon (but not difficult) finds are games released after the first batch. The first and only platform game for the Vectrex, **Spike**, also features decent voice synthesis ... that is, if you don't mind your video game protagonists sounding like frog people. **Web Wars** seems designed to satisfy **Tempest** lovers (a popular coin-op by Atari), who never got their wish to play the real thing at home. **Spinball** fits perfectly into the video pinball genre, and two more space shooters, **Bedlam** and **Star Hawk** (another coin-op conversion) kept customers who craved the system's arcade feel firmly hooked.

That's about where the easy collecting ends and the troubles begin. It seems the later titles were produced in scarce quantities, and finding the cartridges at an affordable price is getting rough. Three of the last releases are "must-haves" for any serious Vectrex owner. **Star Castle** is a perfect rendition of the arcade sleeper, and arguably the best available for this system. **Polar Rescue** is an engrossing submarine sim, and **Fortress of Narzod** is the Vectrex' only true multi-screen shooter—complete with a boss! GCE also claimed the rights to the arcade smash **Pole Position** and added another sports game, **Heads Up Soccer**. If you can grab any of these at or around $50, you're doing fine.

There are also two peripherals for the voracious Vectrex owner, the elusive 3-D Imager and the Light Pen. Each has three compatible games: **3-D Crazy Coaster**, **3-D Narrow Escape**, and **3-D Minestorm** for the Imager and **Animaction**, **Art Master**, and **Melody Master** for the Light Pen. The peripherals are extremely scarce. I'd recommend the 3-D route for most.

Internet has some lively interaction among Vectrex fans. Recently there was an auction at which some of these titles sold at ridiculously high prices ($76 each for **Star Castle** and **Pole Position**. Yikes!). You can even get all of the software through public domain access files, including some interesting demos and samplers. Of course, you'll have to figure a way to get them onto the console! Yes, Vectrex is alive and well and living on the electronic highway. *(Joe Santulli)*

• **Joe Santulli** *is editor of* ***Digital Press****, selected the number one electronic gaming fanzine by* ***EG****'s readers.*

THE KUNKEL REPORT

SEGA MAKES AMENDS

by BILL KUNKEL

It was beginning to get a little scary. No sooner was Sega firmly entrenched as the top dog in video gaming when a persistent trend was beginning to taint its dealings with the fourth estate.

First, Sega started hassling the press about EPROMs, the erasable, programmable ROM boards which are used during development of a video game. Black market versions of unreleased games from several video game publishers began turning up in Hong Kong last year, and the press wound up taking the heat.

Next, advance copies of games for review started drying up, and to top it all off, there was the Orlando Fiasco. It all started immediately after last winter's CES, when Sega announced it would have only a token presence at the summer show in Chicago. Instead, Sega would invite the People Who Count to Orlando in May, for several days of hype, intense heat, and all the golf they could stand.

Unfortunately, the People Who Count did not include the press, which was pointedly *not* invited in an insulting press release which was mass-faxed to the entire press corps. The release pointed out that, with CES and all, we journalists would be far too busy to cover the activities in Orlando. However, the letter continued, even if you *aren't* too busy, and even if your magazine is willing to pay the freight, you still can't come, so don't ask. It was difficult to find a journalist who wasn't offended by both the tone and message itself, strangely reminiscent of Nintendo at its most arrogant.

Then, in a turnaround worthy of Jimmy Carter, Sega was suddenly on the horn, begging the press to attend its Orlando event after all. Amid promises to cover all expenses, we began to change schedules so that at least Ed Dille and I could get to Orlando.

The final act was a beaut. Sega had one of its PR people call each and every magazine with more or less the same story: you may have heard rumors about an event in Orlando. Well, we wanted to invite the press, but the hotel doesn't have room, so we can't have the press come after all. But we'll have a special Gamers' Day at the Sega offices on June 2.

By now, Sega knew it was on the verge of seriously alienating the gaming press. The fact is, the Orlando event was not an appropriate venue for press coverage. Distributors and buyers are notoriously indifferent to game content, they'd rather schmooze and hit the links in 95 degree weather (with a similar humidity level) than actually look at the games they deal in.

June 2. As I step off the elevator onto the second floor of Sega's massive office complex in Redwood City, the first thing to catch my eye is a large statue of Tails, Sonic's bud. The image of the Lord High Hedgehog himself, meanwhile, has been rendered in beautifully frosted blue glass overlooking the lobby.

The conference room is festooned with large, bogus palm trees and Walt Disney notepads. The event has been dubbed "Orlando: Part Deux," and the press kit contains a postcard from Disney World.

There are numerous apologies issued during the six-plus hours of equal parts hype and revelation. Individual executives appeared—including the prez himself—and made a genuine effort to smooth over any ruffled feathers among the press corps members.

The event itself includes far too much reading from press materials (which were already in our hands) on the part of the producers. It's very difficult to sit in a room for six hours—even with breaks—and absorb everything that's talked about and displayed. But the message was powerful, and after all, how often does a rep from a company like Sega pop the top off a development system (the Mars—Sega's into a planetary thing right now) and invite the press monkeys to personally check it out? ("No Silicon Graphics labels in here," we were promised.)

Later we are led out onto the grassy area behind Sega HQ—which also abuts a channel of the S.F. Bay—for lunch. A comedian has been hired to dress up as Ronald Reagan and poke fun at the whole Orlando screw-up. Sega obviously decided that laughter is the best defense. They are right.

Sitting on the shore of the Bay, basking in the warm sun of a rare, almost windless, afternoon in San Francisco, even the most hard-nosed reporter has to acknowledge this event was far more functional than Orlando would have been. I forgave them. This time.

Next issue I'll discuss what we saw at Gamers' Day, along with the implications of the 32X and the truth about Saturn!

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